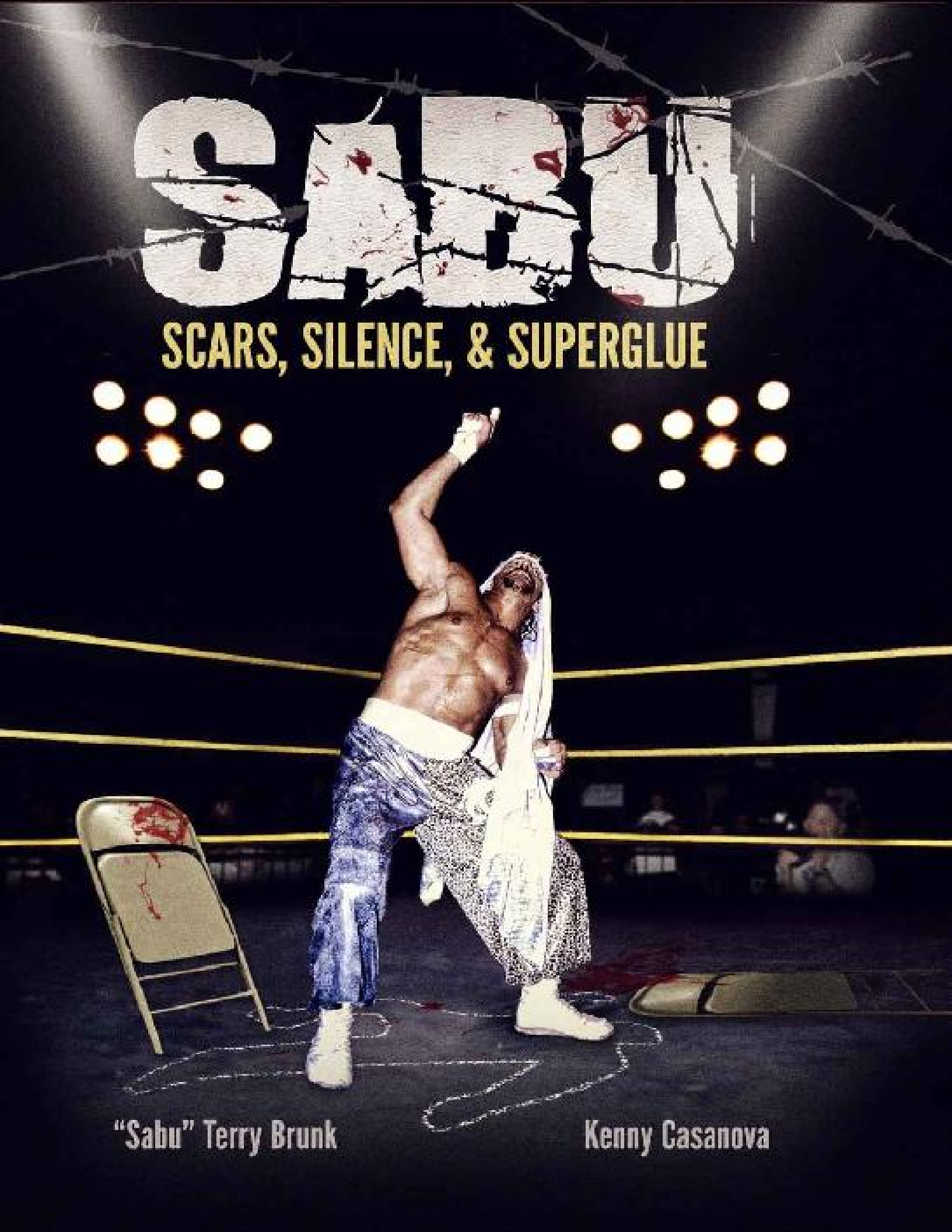
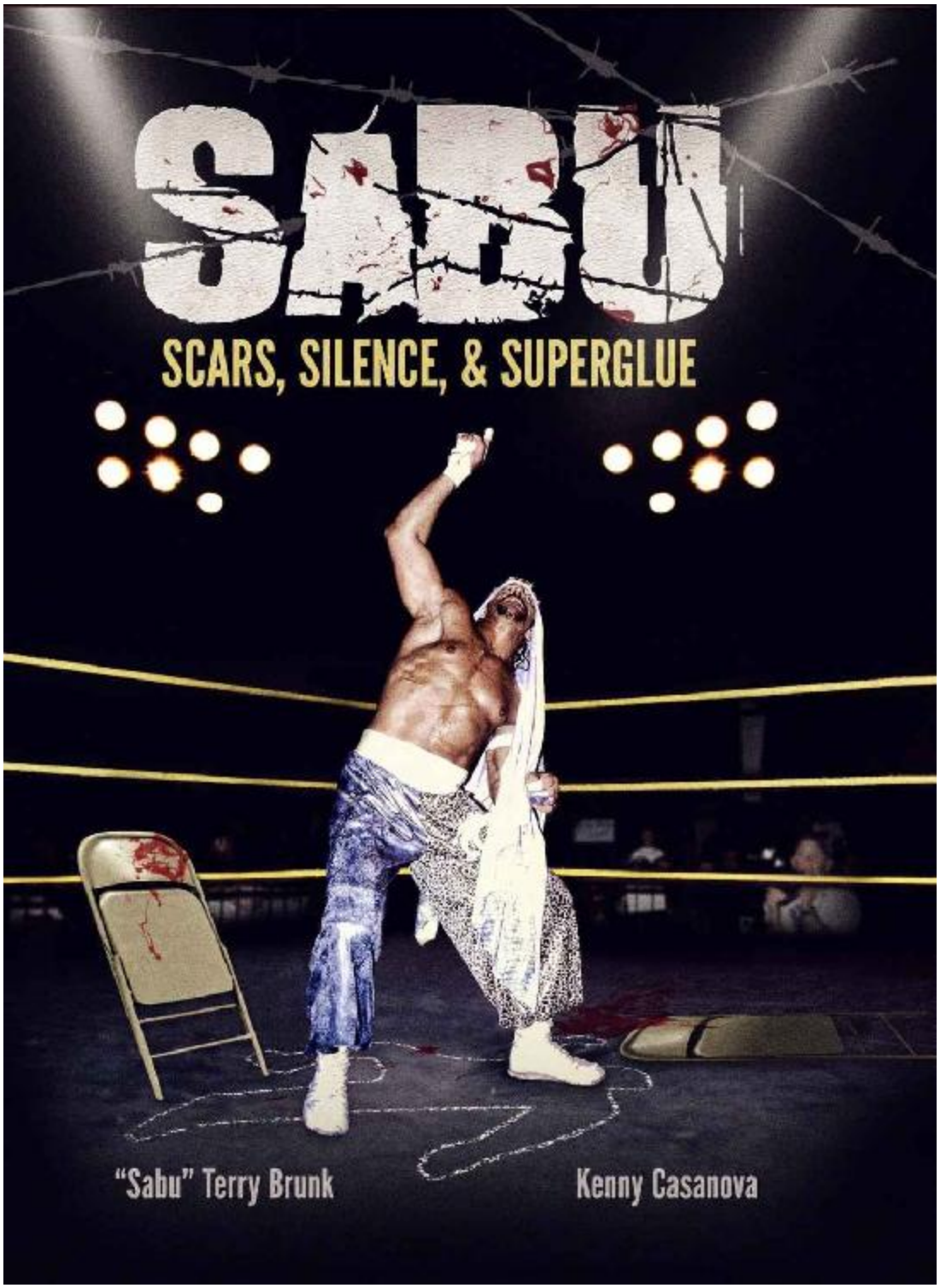
SABU

SCARS, SILENCE, & SUPERGLUE



"Sabu" Terry Brunk

Kenny Casanova


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"Sabu" Terry Brunk
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SABU: Scars, Silence, & Superglue

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The people depicted in this publication were very important people in Sabu's life at one time or another. Therefore, we have tried to best recreate events, locations, and conversations from Sabu's memories of them, but in some cases, minor details have changed due to the effects of many years of steel chair shots to the head, broken jaws, and other brain jarring injuries. In order to maintain anonymity, Sabu has also changed the names of a few individuals, places, identifying characteristics, and details — such as physical properties, occupations, and locations. Although the author and publisher have made every effort to ensure that the information in this book was correct at press time, the author and publisher do not assume and hereby disclaim any liability to any party for any loss, damage, or disruption caused by errors or omissions, whether such errors or omissions result from negligence, accident, or any other cause.
My neck!

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FOREWORD – “RVD” ROB VAN DAM

Sabu was always there for me, even since day one.

Back in December of 1989 was the first time I met Sabu. Our friend, Sampson, whom I had known through bagging groceries, set up the deal for a tryout, so we were off to the Sheik’s son’s garage in the middle of a cold winter. When I walked in, I was looking at a wrestling ring that was cut in half to fit in a mechanic’s garage. It was really weird. It was something like an 8x16 feet long rectangle. Sheik was there. I was a little intimidated at first, and then realized that I wasn’t going to be working out with him or anything, but rather someone else. I didn’t know who this hippie was in the ring with me.

Sabu had long hair, bushy like an afro almost, and he didn’t look at all how he looks now. He was a lot smaller. I was smaller too. I was 185 pounds I think, while now I’m probably around 235. I didn’t want to be rude and ask The Sheik who this dude was in the ring with me. I thought if he was the one who was going to be training with me, he must have been someone, right? So I remember I eyeballed Sabu up and down and tried to figure out just who he was. At this point, I was just 18 years old. All we got for wrestling was WWF on our TV. I didn’t even know there was an independent scene. I looked at Sabu, wondered if he was someone who had his hair different, or maybe was a guy who wrestled with a mask on like a Mr. X, or a Conquistador. After a few minutes of following the commands from the man outside of the ring, it didn’t matter who was in the ring with me. We started training and we immediately clicked.

Sabu for as long as I can remember was always hurting himself because of the crazy stuff he would try. Maybe that is how he built up his huge tolerance for pain? I don’t know. What I do know is that the few us who trained with him all figured he wouldn’t be happy until he was in a wheelchair.

One time during our training time together when The Sheik wasn’t around, I remember wanting to work on some crazy stuff myself. I wanted to learn how to do a jumping spinning back kick out of the turnbuckle. Sabu knew I was a kickboxer. So when I told him I wanted to learn how to do it off the ropes, the request didn’t strike him as weird.

“So, how do I do it?” I asked.

“Just try it.”

Sabu’s answer was just to try it. I didn’t realize it at the time, but there were no rules. Nobody was doing that kind of shit at the time, so asking Sabu how to do it wasn’t really going to get me anywhere. I was hesitant, though, because I didn’t want to hurt the Sheik’s main guy and get any heat, you know?

“Just try it?”

“Yeah.”

“But I mean, how? I haven’t done it before, and I don’t want to hit you too hard.”

“Just try it,” he said, again.

“I don’t want to like break your jaw.”

“Well, when you do try it,” he said, “just try not to break my jaw.”

I laughed at his fearlessness, but he was serious.

“I don’t know how to pull it.”

“Look, you can do it. And if it doesn’t work at first and you break my jaw, we will just have to wait until it heals, but then we will try it again,” he said. “You understand?”

I nodded.

“Right on,” he said.

So, we went over to the corner. We lined the whole thing up. I jumped up a few times to practice where my feet were going to land. Then I went through the motions with nobody there. Once I had it figured out, Sabu stepped right in, offering his face as the target.

I took a breath. I ran up, did my thing and…

BANG!!!

And he was right, I could do it! I was all proud of myself for a moment until I looked down on the mat. After that, Sabu was eating through a straw for weeks.

Now, just as he said though. He was a man of his word. It would be another three weeks before we tried it again, but Sabu was right there again for me once he could chew again, helping me get the courage to do finally do it right. I owe Sabu for that. (Incidentally, that was the same kick that would eventually knock Abyss’s teeth out in TNA.)

Another cool Sabu training story that I remember illustrating Sabu’s superhuman threshold for pain happened in the summer. We had the full

ring set up outside in The Sheik's backyard when Sabu came up to me.

"My uncle isn't around," he said. I immediately knew what that meant. That was code for we didn't have to worry about basics and could do some crazy stuff.

Sheik never said "this is how you don't hurt your opponent," or "this is how to bump like this." Sheik only wanted to see us working on the basics when we were training. That meant a lot of lock up - go behind combos, and pinfall attempts after every big move every time. He believed in us believing in the sport of it. In a real match, you would go for the pin whenever you could to really try to win the match, right? Today, I really appreciate him drilling the basics into us. However, when he would go answer phone, we would immediately jump up to the top rope.

"See, I want to practice diving through the ropes," Sabu said when his uncle was away. "Can you stand there in the grass so I have a target, but move just before I hit you?"

"What the fuck?" I asked. "Why?"

"I want to practice my fall," he said. "I want to like dive through ropes, but land like flat and open on my ribs."

"Like a belly flop?"

"Yeah," he laughed. "The audience will pop because it will look like it really hurt."

"But that's because it actually WILL really hurt," I said, chuckling back. "Are you sure?"

Anyhow, Sabu lined himself up, and I got into position just as he asked. He bounced off ropes, and I moved out of the way last second. Now, he came right at me, graceful as a swan. He kept himself open and yes, it looked just like hell, just like he wanted.

SPLAT! He knocked the wind right out of himself.

"I told you so! I told you so!" I said running over to Sabu who was gasping for air. As soon as he caught a breath, he stumbled to his feet and held his ribs. Sabu was coughing and probably had a broken rib. His eyes were watering and he patted me on the shoulder.

"Let's try it again," he said.

We were so stiff. Our little crew of Samson, Dango, Judge Dredd, Sabu and me, we were the only ones that could handle the beatings. Other guys would come and hang around a day or two, maybe a week if they were

lucky but they would all eventually quit because we were just so stiff. We literally beat the living shit out of each other until we were dead.

Once we got going, the first real territory tour I did was for the USWA in Memphis. I had probably only really had 12 matches or so before this, and I was still really new. We literally made no money in there, coming up paying our dues. I remember crashing with Sabu and four or five other guys in the same small shitty hotel room. It was something like $28 a night at the Jefferson Days Hotel in Indiana. What we would do is move the box spring out from under the bed and lay them both out on the floor. Then we would fight over who would get to sleep on the mattress. Sometimes it was so bad that we would rent space out to the other workers on the show. That is how we both met Lance Storm. “Who is this sleeping in my room?” Sabu said one night, stepping over the new Canadian. I was like the only babyface in our crew and therefore I at least could sell my pictures to the fans during intermission, but our other guys made literally nothing. We almost had no money, but Sabu was often the first to buy us something to eat with the little bit he had.

Sabu was all about survival; outside of the ring and in. I remember one time in a barb wire match in Japan, what really impressed me was Sabu’s improvability. Now, I don’t mean in calling spots and all, which he did, but I mean his ability to use whatever he had to make the best of a bad situation. One time, he got a massive cut from one of the barbs but didn’t freak out. He had the wherewithal to see that he was going to bleed to death, so he just calmly ripped the athletic tape off of his wrists to close his arm up to finish the match. He just bit into the tape with his teeth and rewrapped it over the wound. How many battles do you have to have to build up the knowledge to do something like this out of instinct?

Speaking of crazy injuries, one time Sabu went down from a vicious Sandman whack on the head. When he came back to the locker room, Sabu looked drunker than the bastard that just hit him, and he didn’t yet have anything to drink. He was floating in and out of consciousness and it was obvious that he had a bad concussion. After falling over one too many times, the medics scooped him up onto a Gurney and started to wheel him over to the ambulance.

Sabu rolled off.

“No!” he said to the medics trying to help him. “Rob. Don’t let them take me!” Then as quickly as he said that, he went back unconscious.

The medics picked him back up, put him on the stretcher with wheels, and headed right back in route towards the ambulance.

Sabu rolled off again. “No! Rob!” he said calling for me. “I said, don’t let them take me!”

“If you can stay awake, I won’t,” I said.

“Deal,” he said, before immediately closing his eyes and passing out once again.

Incidentally, I rode over to the hospital with him myself that night.

I have never met anyone who loved wrestling as much as Sabu. When he was making great money and really needed the time off, he didn’t want to slow down even one bit for a little break. He would continue to take bookings even when ECW was off for a weekend when everybody else was resting. He really was amazing in that way.

Sabu and I are the last of the old school. It is a whole different thing today. Today, if the curtain got jerked open, people would think wrestlers are all friends and that we love each other, but where we came from, it wasn’t like that.

When Sabu and I would do Japan, there was always a lot of crazy stuff going on. You could say that wrestling was supposed to be fake, but back in the day especially over in Japan, there was a lot of brutal competitive shit going on in the ring every night. If we were working one of those trademark cluster-fuck Japanese tag matches with massive teams, Sabu and I would stand out on the apron waiting for our turns and figure out how to throw their own competitive crap right back at them. We would just talk about blowing up guys and not tagging in to stay away from certain guys on the other side who were having the same conversation about us. Sabu didn’t give a shit and that was what I love about him. When he had to, he would treat it real.

Another time in ECW, we were at a venue in Boston. We were very old school as you know, and kayfabe was still a very big thing. It’s not like now where everyone and their mom goes through. Back then, we didn’t let just anyone come in the locker room. Admittance was only on a need-to-be-there basis. Outsiders could expose the business. Anyhow, we were talking

out our match when all of a sudden a concession guy that worked for the hall excused himself and walked right between our little discussion circle.

“Who the fuck was that?” Sabu said, pissed as hell.

He ignored the offense the first time, but the second time the vendor took a shortcut through our dressing room, Sabu was right there to give him the business.

“Fuck you, hot dog man! Go around!” While he was trying to pop the boys, he was actually serious at the same time in that he didn’t want him coming through there. We went back to discussing the show, until the third time he came through, still not taking the hint. Sabu politely excused himself from our conversation and literally pushed him out the door, returning like nothing had happened.

Finally, however, Sabu had enough. On the final shortcut event, Sabu smacked the vendor tray right out of his hands, and the boy went running. Sabu shrugged, unwrapped the foil on one of the hot dogs and started eating it.

Sabu was like the leader of the pack. Being on the road with him was like camping with your family as a kid. Once he got his Winnebago, we would drive until we couldn’t drive anymore and stop at like a Walmart. Then we would sit in lawn chairs and get some sun in the parking lot. It was funny to see him cook in the little redneck kitchenette, fully dressed in gimmick. That mobile home was a monster. I don’t know how many fenders we pulled off of cars squeezing down the little skinny streets of Queens.

…Not only did Sabu teach me firsthand how to actually wrestle, but he also taught me the ways of the industry. This included a lot. When I first got to ECW, he said, “those guys were the shits, and these guys are good.” I took that as fact before I eventually learned how to analyze the talent better and eventually learned he was right.

When I say Sabu showed me the ways of the business, I don’t mean just like etiquette, or how to protect the business, but actually how to handle my business itself. Sabu taught me my value. If it wasn’t for him telling me I was better than everyone else and that we were on another level – I wouldn’t have known and probably would have settled for peanuts like everyone else. He taught me insight that I wouldn’t have without him – and even when to ask for more money.

“How long has it been since you asked for a raise,” he asked me after I really started to take off in ECW. After I answered, he would say, “Ask for another.”

“But…”

“But it doesn’t matter, ask for another.”

He seriously is the most generous man I’ve ever met as far as legitimately wanting to help out other people.

Sabu even taught me real-life things about being a man.

Sabu changed the business. If you saw ECW, or Japan wrestling – you know he has left his mark. I think that most wrestlers will all agree with this. Taking a lead from The Sheik’s bold ways, Sabu found a way to also be original in his own way and how to always strive to be different. He is the originator of so much, and the innovator of being innovative. There are a lot of imitators who tried to copy him – but he is the first. He is the O.G.-ist of the O.G.s and still loves the business more than anyone today.

No matter where he is right now, I know that he wishes he was in the ring if he is not.

- RVD



FOREWORD – TAZ

As far as my first impression of Sabu, it wasn’t in ECW, as some might have thought. I actually met Sabu before ECW, in Minnesota at a spot show that he and I were both booked on. Right away, I knew then that Sabu’s focus to succeed in the business was extremely important to him at a young age. It was this same focus that I knew would take him far.

When we wrestled each other for the first time in Philly for ECW, I was basically just there to put over Sabu, the whole push was for Sabu. Paul wanted to push him hard, and I knew that I was just there to give him a competitive match. At that point early on, though, I felt like Sabu was going to be *huge*, so I was cool with it for sure. I could tell Sabu was going to be a star soon, and I was not only honored to wrestle him but also be able to challenge myself to work with such a unique athlete.

Many fans come up to us even today and suggest that the Taz-Sabu history on screen was one of the most memorable feuds ever. Some might argue that it was Paul’s pairing of us that led to this, but it wasn’t just good storytelling — there was something else there. Not only did Paul see it, but both Sabu and I also saw it when we got into the ring together. After our first match, we both knew that some kind of chemistry was happening for sure immediately.

As history shows, though, we didn't just flow right into the “feud.” We started slow. We first spent a good amount of time together as a tag team and saw some real success, but we honestly weren't the “best of buddies” while we were working together in that team. We actually didn't like each other really much at all, and Paul recognized this.

So, a few years after Sabu and I had been working together a team, Paul decided to have me return from my neck injury as a pissed off, jealous heel and target Sabu. We did that for one year straight. For the longest time, Paul didn’t want Sabu to even acknowledge me on the air, and to his credit, he took everything I had to say and didn’t say anything back. I actually gained a lot of respect for him then, because I know that it was probably hard for Sabu to not react on air, as I continued to call him out week after week after week on ECW television in front of everyone.

After that full of year build up, we eventually had set the stage. Both the wrestlers backstage and the ECW fans already knew that we had lots of real

tension toward each other backstage and for a long time, too. This made our match huge. When we finally got into the ring together, we kept it professional but were really stiff and aggressive. Our chemistry was the perfect payoff for everybody watching. Our competitive natures brought us both up to the next level from that match. He and I were always competitive with each other due to our passion to be the number one wrestler (for real) in the company, and it all paid off.

Sabu truly was ahead of his time. He was always must-see TV. Even though his style was considered unpredictable, he was smart and his unpredictability was actually more like controlled mayhem.

Sabu's risky style and always wanting to give his best often left him prone to injury. The legend of him Supergluing massive open wounds together so he would be able to wrestle the next night are all true stories ... I have witnessed it myself many times. Because of his high tolerance of pain, I've always said he is, by far, the toughest son of a bitch I've ever wrestled against.

I remember one time I clotheslined him in a match in North Carolina, and my arm caught him across his jaw. It was a very snug blow and unfortunately, in the end, it broke his jaw. Talk about tough. Sabu missed *zero* time from TV and the road. That night after the match, he didn't go to the hospital and risk missing a flight — he just taped it up. Imagine that. It would be insanely hard to pull something off like that for most people, but not Sabu. He did that kind of thing all the time. His work ethic was amazing, and he loved to work.

While I don't really have any road stories, because we didn't really travel together, looking back, there is more I would like to say about Sabu the man.

Sabu was underrated. He deserves a boatload of credit for what he has done for pro wrestling as a man who worked his ass off nonstop. He was the first guy I ever saw to incorporate tables into his gimmick. He wrestled every match like it was his last. And his respect for the business was evident by his endless sacrifices as a performer.

There are *tons* of these young wrestlers out there today that have been totally inspired by Sabu, and I feel more people need to say that publicly because *it's the truth.*

I have said it before to others and will say it right here again, but to everybody:

There would be no “TAZ” without Sabu.

I thank him for all the matches he and I wrestled. I have nothing but the utmost respect for Sabu**,** both for his legacy as a wrestler and the respect he deserves as the man he is.

- TAZ



CHAPTER 0 – IN THE DARK

Déjà vu.

Did you ever smell something or taste something that transported you back to another time and place? Did you ever get hit with maybe just the right combo of stuff that unburied a memory at the worst time that was hiding in the back of your head?

It was *WrestleMania 23*. I was almost under my biggest spotlight ever. There, I was really going to have to focus, but something else in my brain was about to get in the way.

Pre-match rituals. I was jogging around, trying to get my heart going. I was jumping up and down and warming up when we finally got our signal. Time. It was off to the races.

I rushed down the hall toward my biggest audience of all time. The hair stood up on the back of my neck. My adrenaline was pumping. I dodged a few people in my path. I heard my music.

I found myself standing only a few feet away from the ramp that would put me out in front of 80,000 people at Ford Field in Detroit, Michigan. Then it hit me.

A familiar taste.

There was a numbing sensation, like a dry feeling in the roof of my mouth that I couldn't swallow away. I took a swig of water to try to kill it, but the water went down funny

The dryness followed up with almost the smell of ammonia.

Yeah, I was about to work with some familiar old faces, but remembering an old match in an old bingo hall wasn't the nice, nostalgic flashback I was about to have at all when I really needed to be sharp.

I tried to swallow hard, but couldn't.

I closed my eyes.

The thousand voices of the fans stopped.

I remembered two people dancing...

Darkness.

My head is spinning. Where am I?

Is this what it's like to be dead?

What happened to me? I can't even focus on what's going on right now, let alone remember the past.

I remember that something hit me in the face, but that felt like days ago - or maybe months, or even years since that happened.

I'm trying to swallow, but can't. My eyes are shut. Nothing makes any sense. Everything just went black. The voices stopped. Everything is spinning. It feels like a dream.

I try to remember. Why I am here? Then, finally, it comes to me, and it hit me like a bullet in the face …

It was midnight again in that little corner of my brain. I was back in Lansing, Michigan.

Two people danced in front of me as I stepped out of the way, last second. Mariachi music was jamming. Some familiar old faces were drinking beer and eating empanadas. Some were smoking. A bunch of my friends were there. They were all wearing their bow ties and rocking their pointy shoes like they were going to church. Some people were finally bumping into me, realizing I was there for the big event and greeting me with high fives.

I was nineteen, again. I just walked across the street from the garage where I had been living for almost a year. There was Robert. He was a year younger than me. He laughed at his "milestone achievement," and the idea that everyone he knew was there for his big graduation party.

While it wasn't much, his friends threw in all the money they had to make the party special. Rob had always helped us out many times before, so we all figured he was worth it. He was a good friend.

We had quite a spread. There was rice and beans and tacos. There was a burrito bar. There was beer. Being underage, it was a little tough to get the booze, but somehow we managed. The drinks were going fast, though. Not even an hour or so in and there were only four beers left in the red Igloo cooler, and only a little whiskey left in the bottle underneath a table in the grass.

One of the boys elbowed me and pointed at the dwindling supply.

"We gotta do something about that," he said.

I nodded.

It was July 18, 1983. I remembered the date well because it was only one day after my brother John's twenty-first birthday. A few of the guys who had gone to my brother's party were back once again to join in on these festivities. Pretty much everyone was Mexican, except for me, and a couple of guys we never saw before crossing the street toward our lawn.

"Hey," a six-foot-two, almost 300-pound African American said. He came up to me and kind of invaded my personal space. "Mind if me and my brother come over?"

I ignored him and turned to look away. It really wasn't my place to answer, and I wasn't much of a talker anyhow.

One of the others took my cue and spoke up, "Sorry, man. Private party, yunno?" The two strangers shrugged and disappeared back to washing their Lincoln across the street, as they had been most of the night.

"It must be the smell," Robert said. "Like hungry dogs, they've been wandering over here all night looking for a taste of the Mexican food, I think."

Back then, I was no stranger to drinking, but it didn't take as much to put a little buzz on me — especially mixing the drinks up. Off around the side of the house was a little fire. A couple of the guys were hanging around in the shadows.

Eventually, the strangers scored asking the right guy at the party. "You guys want to come over? Just bring your own drinks and you can," he said.

That's all they needed to hear.

It wasn't long before I had a gut-feeling that their invite was a bad idea. I kept my eyes on them as they filled their plates and filled their bellies. I mean, I wasn't staring at them or anything, but I knew that the big guy was bad news.

A few of the boys finally returned with a refill for the coolers. I was talking to this one girl I kind of liked, when over in the corner my eyes I was surveying the first red flags of an argument. I think it was a fight over the strangers grabbing drinks and not living up to the agreement. The alcohol in my own system slowed my response. I saw what was happening, but it was all in slow motion. I turned to see the bigger of the two thugs arguing with our friend José.

Then, he reached into his pants and pulled out something. He held it like a country western.

POPPP!!! POPPP!!!

I smelled gunpowder.

As Joe stepped back, his white shirt flooded with red.

Everything then happened so fast. I looked in the crowd and charged. I ran right into the mess, pushing my own friends aside looking for the shooter in the center. Joe was on the ground holding his stomach when the shooter fired a second shot. He actually missed Joe with the recoil from the shot and the bullet hit my friend Richard in the hip.

I saw red. I was pissed!

As three or four of my boys pulled away the smaller of the two strangers, I speared the shooter with my shoulder, knocking the gun out of his hand and far out of reach.

We both hit the dirt. We rolled around. He definitely had a good sixty to seventy pounds on me, but that didn't matter to me.

WHAPP!

Just as I pulled back to hit him again, he pushed something under my chin and my head snapped back.

What the fuck was that? Brass knuckles? A roll of quarters, maybe?

As I struggled to get free, it didn't take long to find out.

POPPP!!!

Everything went black. There was a loud *ping* like a bell rang hard right in both of my ears. It was like hitting a hammer on an anvil. I was deaf. I saw stars. With my eyes closed, I saw purple and flashes of red, then it felt like I was underwater. After a few moments that felt like an eternity, my senses started to trickle back.

I knew what had happened, but I couldn't fucking believe it. *That cocksucker had two guns.* The first one I knocked over in the dirt was some kind of pistol, but the second was like a 32.

Holy shit?!

A numbing sensation crawled over my jaw and crept up over my whole face. I had a dry feeling in the roof of my mouth. My tongue was splintered and it tasted like an acid ammonia in my mouth.

I couldn't swallow. Everything was wet and gritty. My gums felt like cotton and every sucking breath felt like I was in the middle of a thick cloud of gunpowder that wouldn't go away.

I crawled off of the shooter on all fours. My vision was foggy. The people around me gasped. There was a swirling cloud around my head that looked like a gray halo.

I looked up to my friends and tried to tell them I was okay, but nothing really came out. I could see my friends were starting to panic, but I just wanted to keep them calm.

I pulled myself to my feet and staggered off away from the grass. I wriggled my tongue around to take inventory in my mouth. Exposed roots. My four front teeth were pretty much gone, leaving only a few sharp jagged remnants behind. There was so much residue.

I sucked hard on what was left of my choppers, and then spit hard onto the sidewalk. In the syrupy rope that fell from my jaw, I felt little chunks of teeth drop over the numbness of my lips. When I looked down at the pavement, I felt nauseous looking at a mixture of bone shards, blood, and bullet pieces.

Luckily for me, when my teeth shattered, so did the bullet. If it hadn't, that fucker may have ended up in my brain.

Some of the shrapnel, however, did head north. The bits exploded upwards into my palate and nasal cavity, and pieces jagged around into my throat. (The back of my throat still has shrapnel in it to this very day.) I could feel a hole in the upper portion of my mouth, just to the left of my nose, maybe a half of an inch down. I had powder burns all around my mouth and cheeks.

You motherfucker! You shot me in the face! You couldn't have picked another spot?!

After he shot me, I backed off him, but my friends immediately went into attack mode, beating on him. After getting my bearings back, I saw maybe a dozen Mexicans stomping the living shit out of that asshole. I immediately got jealous. I wanted to stomp, too.

You shot me in the face.

Teeth or no teeth, I wanted my own revenge. I squinted hard into the middle of the circle. I found my target. Then, I ran like a field goal kicker, ready to kick that asshole right in his face. My boys knew what was up. They saw me coming and parted to give me my moment.

Before I could kick him, the whole ground lit up. There was a loud siren.

The shooter looked in much worse shape than I did. My boys had already kicked the living shit out of him, and I was standing over his motionless body.

“Get on the ground!” I heard from a voice say behind the bright light.

I put my hands up in the air, and watched in terror as they located the gun by my feet, thinking it was mine.

“Wait! It wasn’t me!”

From behind, someone pulled both of my hands together and spun my body around and cuffed me. My eyes immediately went out of focus. I looked down and saw the second gun that shot me for a moment, smoking in the grass. I turned my head to look away from the headlights and realized that I was being pushed towards a police car!

“Wait, no. It was the fucking black guy!” I spit blood. I could barely talk. “There! Him! He shot the gun. And he shot it at me!”

Now in my mind, I figured the cop behind me should have heard what I had said, realized that I was actually the victim, and then let me go. Literally, everyone there was Mexican. It should have been pretty easy to identify who the shooter was with just that description. However, the cop behind me didn’t take my word for it. He didn’t drop me. He seemed to shove me even harder.

“Did you hear me? It was the fucking black guy over there, I said! That’s the fucking asshole!”

“I heard you the first time,” the faceless voice behind me replied. He jacked up my arms up over my head, and a sharp pain jolted up into my shoulders. I fell face first into the pavement. Little pebbles poked into me like needles and stuck to my chin. That didn’t matter. He yanked me back up off of the ground and continued to march me toward his car.

When we got there, he spun me half around. He held my cuffed hands in one hand and opened the rear passenger door with the other. I was finally able to look up and make eye contact with my angry arresting officer.

Oh shit. The cop is a black guy! Did saying “fucking black guy” piss him off? Shit.

Bad timing. I was in the wrong place at the wrong time, and he took what I said the wrong way. I screamed, “fucking black guy” only for description purposes so the officer knew who to arrest because everyone else was Latino. It wasn’t meant to be racist, but I could see why he may have

perceived it as a slur. Cops deal with assholes every day. I get it, but color was the only point of reference I really had.

Rather than to protect the perpetrator's head and lower me into the back seat as you would see on TV, he twisted me hard and threw me into the car. My face went down where your feet are supposed to go, and my ass was up in the air. With his foot, the policeman pushed my butt in hard to clear the door. Then, he slammed it shut behind me.

For about ten minutes, I wriggled and turned inch by inch trying to adjust myself into a seated position in the back of the squad car. The back of my head kept hitting the bottom lip of the protective Plexi-glass divider between the front and back seats. I watched as a pool of my own blood started to form on the floor mat in front of my face.

I had no visible bullet wounds. Upside down, with my arms behind my back, I thought I was going to choke to death in the back of that car.

Finally, the paramedics came, along with a few other police cars. Fortunately for me, my cousin was one of the guys from the rescue team. When he got out of the ambulance, one of my boys recognized him and rushed over to tell him what had happened.

"You got my cousin, Terry, in the back of the car," he said. "He is the one who got shot, but he was on his feet so you couldn't tell."

My cousin went up to the police who were trying to get a report from someone who barely spoke English at the party. He finally cleared everything up, and they switched me from the back of the police car to where I really belonged: the back of the ambulance.

I am just going to tell my mom I got hit in the face with a baseball bat, then I am just going to leave.

That ride to the hospital was hell. The numbness from shock and adrenaline started to wear off. Everything started to hurt. I touched the missing teeth again with the tip of my tongue. My mouth was a mangled mess. Chunks of meat hung down.

On the way to the hospital, I kept telling myself that I was soon going to be all right, and get stitched up, but I really had no idea. My head felt really light. My hands started to tingle.

I don't remember ever making it to the hospital.

It was all darkness. I lost a lot of blood.

The rest of what happened were puzzle pieces because I was in and out of consciousness. Minutes of my life were missing. I was opening and closing my eyes, with hours in between.

I think I hear my mother crying. I want to tell her I am going to be okay, but I really can't talk. I can't open my mouth.

I was fully aware one moment, then fast asleep the next. The combination of the pain and the medication trying to counter it was crazy.

They say sleep is the closest thing to death.

I finally sat straight up in the hospital cot.

Everything was clear.

Some motherfucker tried to kill me.

I didn't talk. I had been out of it for days. The reason I was hooked up to a feeding tube was finally as clear as the shit getting pumped into me. I lost a lot of time after that. Everything after getting thrown into that cop car, all of that, I couldn't really remember.

I had glimpses of my mother crying in the chair next to me. I also had slides of my uncle patting me on the shoulder and sitting close. They meant the world to me. The people who meant the most to me gave me a few moments of comfort.

What the fuck?! I got shot in the mouth?!

I had no idea what was going on with the guy who had shot me. I could see his face, and feel his hard breath against mine as we struggled on the ground. I wondered what happened to the guy that left me to die.

Confidence. During my four days in that hospital, I started to get tough, mentally. I knew I had stood up to a giant of a man trying to protect my friends. I had survived getting shot in the face. What could ever be worse than that? Enduring that experience and everything after that made me stronger.

The guy who shot me may have taken my teeth, but he gave me self-reliance.

My mother was curled up in a chair next to me, passed out after crying herself to sleep again.

I eventually crawled out of that horrible hospital bed. My back ached. My head was still groggy from the leftover traces of medication in my veins. I stumbled to the bathroom and looked in the mirror for the first time.

With my mouth closed, I could barely see any evidence that anything happened. It only looked like I had two fat lips. I pushed my top lip down and looked under my nose. Despite the redness, there was only a little tiny hole. Then, I lifted my upper lip and opened my mouth.

It was a horror show.

The real damage from the bullet was all on the inside.

Everything in the upper front portion of my teeth was a wreck. Shards poked out of my broken up at the gums. There was still bleeding.

They can't leave it like that, can they? I look like a fucking gremlin.

It's funny. Some people have nightmares about losing their teeth. Teeth are in many cultures looked at as a sign of success and wealth. Having your teeth to many is a status symbol. However, I didn't think about any of that at all. I was alive. The loss of my teeth strangely didn't bother me. I didn't smile much anyways, so I really didn't care.

I couldn't chew food. I could only really drink protein shakes. That is exactly what I was doing when my friend Tony came by.

He wanted to talk to me, but he knew I couldn't respond. So rather than cause me more distress, he just walked up to my bed and shook his head. Then, he held up a huge bag and dumped a massive stack of wrestling magazines on my lap.

I tried my best to smile, and Tony nodded.

When Tony left, I wasn't alone. Billy Graham was there. Dusty Rhodes was there. Sgt. Slaughter was there. They were all there for me. I flipped through the first pages like a kid in a candy store.

"Sorry to interrupt," a nurse said, coming into the room to give me a new ice pack. I was supposed to hold the bag to my face, but I just didn't do it. The moment she left, I would drop the coldness to the floor, and I dug right back into the pile.

I thumbed through the magazines and looked at the covers. I saw Ric Flair. I saw Jesse Ventura, and then I came across one edition with a very familiar face on the cover. Before me, right there in my lap, was a bloody mess picture of my uncle, aka The Sheik.

As a kid, my uncle was pretty much my father figure. He was around more than my dad was. I didn't really know my real father. I mean, I know who he was, but we didn't have a relationship. I really looked up to my uncle, and I hoped to one day follow in his footsteps.

At that point more than ever before, it was the best time I could think of to ask what I was about to ask. If I could survive all that had happened to me, I figured I could totally handle a shitty match in a ring. It was finally time for me to make my move and ask my uncle the question.

I know my mother didn't want to see me in a ring, but I didn't care. I got on the phone and starting dialing my uncle. After surviving a bullet to the face, I knew it was time.

"So?" I asked, struggling to get the words out of my mangled mouth and hoping for the best.

"So?"

"Will you train me to wrestle?"

Flash-forward. Not too long after that, I was stepping into my first wrestling ring, and sometime after that, I was stepping into the ring at *WrestleMania 23*.

Smelling the pyro in the air, I swallowed that hard acrid taste down to focus on my biggest match ever.

I shook it off. I looked around the arena at the biggest crowd watching me ever.

I once took a fucking bullet to the face. This match doesn't mean shit. I got this.


WRESTLEMAN



CHAPTER 1 – KID STUFF

One of my first memories as a kid was eating breakfast and looking over to see Big Time Wrestling's show, *World Wide Sports*, on the TV set. I didn't know it at the time, but the name of the program was like a play on the UK more widely-known sports program title, *Wide World of Sports*, oh, and that it was also owned by a family member.

Probably around 1966, or 1967, I remember seeing my family kind of huddled around the TV, looking very concerned, and this concerned me. Before I even knew he was my uncle, I looked at the television and there he was.

Edward George Farhat was my mother's brother. He was better known to the world by his stage name: *The Sheik*. To wrestling fans later on, he was sometimes called "The Original Sheik" to distinguish him from that other whacko, The Iron Sheik, a wrestler who wouldn't even debut until 1972. To call him "Original," however, is an understatement, and I don't like that word. He was "The" Sheik.

At the time, I remember watching The Sheik on TV in awe. This guy was doing shit that I could never even dream of. At 5'11" and 245 pounds, he wasn't exactly the biggest man to step foot in the ring, but his actions were always huge. At a very young age, there was a period of time that I had no idea that the guy on TV was also the guy we would see on the weekends. I thought they were two different people!

The Sheik's character was a larger-than-life rich wild man from Syria. The first time I laid eyes on him, I saw him using an obvious stalling tactic, as he would seemingly every match after that, kneeling on a prayer rug to pray to Allah before the bell. Once it rang, he really was the dirtiest fighter going. He would punch, stomp, bite, pull hair, and lock on deadly choke holds and refuse to break them. He was the kind of guy that would make your grandmother jump off of the couch and scream at the TV screen.

The funny thing is, as a child, I didn't look at all this stuff he was doing as "cheating" like others did. I had three brothers and three sisters, and I was the youngest of them all. Since The Sheik was smaller than his opponent, I could totally relate to what he was doing in the squared circle. I just thought he was trying to survive.

Brawling wasn’t all he was known for. He was also known to use weapons. One thing he did was hide pencils in his tights, and then he would sneak them out to cut open his opponent's faces! From the years and years of extensive scarring on his forehead, it was easy to tell that this tactic must have backfired from time to time. When that happened, he would have to fall back on firing out “Plan B.”

“*Oh my!*” my mother shrieked when she saw it.

“What in the hell was that?” my brother John gasped.

The girls covered their faces.

My eyes almost bugged out of my head that Saturday morning. I remember walking away from the table and my nice bowl of cereal, after first seeing The Sheik throw his trademark fireball right into his opponent’s face!!!

For this match, Sheik was wrestling some Indian dude, and the guy just dropped like he was melting.

“We’ve seen that before!” the commentator belted. “Yes, this always ends up badly. I’m sure The Sheik has burned his face severely!”

After igniting a piece of paper soaked in lighter fluid with a cigarette lighter that was hidden in his trunks, The Sheik cinched his opponent back into the Camel Clutch. This time it was successful. Fans everywhere in Michigan were cursing up a storm, but I sat there mesmerized in front of the TV, an impressionable young kid.

The smaller guy pulled it off!

All week long, all I could think about was that match. The kids around my block saw it, too. The other kids at school would say he was the devil, and he was a motherfucker, but I just didn’t understand why. I knew he cheated, but I thought it was just fighting hard.

Yeah, he stabbed someone with a pencil and burned someone, but he was surviving, right?

Next week was the rematch. We all gathered around the living room to see what he was going to do next. Since it was a small room, we had Big Time Wrestling running on both of our televisions, one up in a bedroom and the other downstairs. I was so young that I didn’t even quite understand what was going on. I didn’t want to miss anything, so I was running upstairs and downstairs throughout the entire match, thinking that I might see

something different — like maybe there were two separate matches being played at the same time.

I was so young, I didn't understand how live TV worked. When Sheik was winning in the living room, I would run upstairs to see how he was doing in the "other match."

"Terry," my mother would laugh. "It's the same thing!"

Just then, there was another fireball. My whole family all jerked away from the screen at the same time and swallowed. This time it wasn't the same. The referee saw it.

The Sheik got disqualified!

When I came downstairs, my brothers and sisters were elated that the bad guy lost and justice was finally served. They were clapping their hands and cheering along with everyone in our city, everyone except one.

A little five-year-old walked into the room and was crying.

He lost.

Maybe he didn't win that day, but The Sheik had damn sure well did one thing — *he won my attention.*

BIG FAMILY

My mother and father got divorced when I was three. From as early as I can remember, I always thought my new stepfather was a dick. I didn't like him. Following my brother and sisters' leads, we didn't much listen to him when he was around. If one of us were picking fights in school or getting bad grades, it didn't matter if we heard anything about it from him, or even my mom for that matter. She was so tired from working to support us all, that she would give in easy.

The only real day I would ever have to worry about what I had done during the week was sometimes on Sunday. That was my real day of getting disciplined. If we visited my uncle, he would ask my mom what we were up to. If she had something bad to report, that is when I would get talked down. When The Sheik cut a promo and scolded, *I listened.*

As far as weekdays with my family were concerned, I'll have to admit, there was chaos. With three brothers and three sisters all older than me,

growing up in the same house, it definitely felt like a food chain — and I was at the very bottom.

Don’t get me wrong; they loved me. At a very young age, my sisters taught me to read, write and tell time before kindergarten. I remember showing the teacher that I could tie my own shoes and all the praise that I got for that trick. When I was a very little kid, they thought I was a genius. However, when I was old enough to run in those shoes that I tied myself, I often found I had a reason to run, so I was always off running.

I didn’t play-wrestle with my brothers like some kids did. They used to literally just beat me up.

I mean, I wasn’t abused, but everything that you could imagine from a family who had loose ties to wrestling. My siblings pulled my hair, punched me, bit me — they really toughened me up. The sad part is, they didn’t even really like wrestling, so it wasn’t like they could blame it on just doing what they saw their uncle, The Sheik, doing to some stumble-bum on TV. They only cared that he was famous, not that he was a wrestler. I was the one who really got into the idea of the sport.

I have to admit, from time to time, I may have instigated a little, after watching some wrestling. I would get excited because I didn’t just watch wrestling — I studied it.

I could picture being a wrestler in my future, so I really wanted to learn all the moves. I watched how wrestlers fell to the mat. I watched how they locked up. I took note on how a wrestler would break a particular hold. Quite often, it was only natural that I would want to try some moves out on one of my sisters or brothers. I was only trying to emulate something new that I hadn’t seen before, but I wasn’t smart about it. It always ended the same way. I would get my ass handed to me. They weren’t sympathetic at all.

Even when I wasn’t the instigator, they all beat me up good for fifteen years straight — the girls maybe a little bit less, because they couldn’t always catch me. My sisters I could outrun, which would often save me from a whooping, but as for my brothers, I just couldn’t. They were just too quick.

One of my brothers, John, was one year older than I was. The other, Chris, was two years my senior. In their unfair yet traditional way of bullying, they always double-teamed me, the smaller guy, and won. Around

the time I started wrestling in junior high, I started thinking about the day when I could make them stop. I didn't know it at the time, but that day was still a long way out.

The brotherly beatings would continue until the middle of high school.

TAKING THE PISS OUT OF IT

Now, this is likely going to throw some of you for a loop. A bunch of you probably bought this book thinking that you would read how big and tough Sabu was growing up, and yeah there may be some of that. Some still call me "The Hardcore Legend" because of how much of my blood they would see in some of my matches. When I announced that I would be writing the story of my life, a lot of fans immediately expected that I would be talking about the blood, sweat, and tears that went into becoming who I am today. However, I bet you didn't think you would be reading about my urine.

I peed my bed until I was about thirteen.

I am not shitting you, nor was I shitting my bed, but I sure as hell did piss in it.

Einstein. Hemingway. Thomas Edison. Many innovative and genius minds wet their beds as children, so at least I am in good company.

Bedwetting isn't caused by drinking too much before bedtime. It's not because the child is too lazy to get out of bed to go and use to the bathroom. And most children do not wet the bed on purpose, looking for attention, or out of spite or to irritate their parents. For me, I don't know why I did it, and I really didn't want to. Waking up every morning to a potentially embarrassing scene was not my way of starting the day out right.

Oh, please God, I hope it didn't happen again.

I was eleven, maybe twelve. I remember waking up thinking all was okay. I reached down. My crotch was dry. I moved my hand around the coldness of the sheet. I had a moment of relief. It seemed like everything was clean, and I was all in the good. Then, I rolled over a little and gave the sheets one more ceremonial pat-down just to make sure, as part of my morning rituals.

No, please, no!

I put my hand right down into a wet spot. I shook my head in disgust for myself, and also the next part of what had to happen, if I didn't want to paint a target on my back again.

It’s weird. By this point, I was already regularly irregular. My brain became trained enough to wake me up somewhat early to see if I had wet the bed, but it couldn’t seem to keep me from doing so in the first place. Usually, when I woke up early, it was because I was already too late.

When I found that I had once again had an accident, I got up, as always, trying my hardest to make a sound. I shared a room with my brothers, and of course, wanted to give them absolutely no reason to mess with me.

I closed my eyes. I slowly lowered my right leg off the side of the bed, until my toes touched the floor. Then, I slid my body off the mattress as softly as I could, to avoid a telling creak from the box spring. Once I was on solid ground, I raised my back and opened my eyes to see if the coast was clear.

Thank god. They are still asleep.

I silently fiddled around with the bedding. Once I was able to remove just the affected sheets I dropped them to the floor into a crumpled pile. Then, to cover my tracks and escaped from the crime unseen with the evidence. I smoothed out the comforter behind me so nobody could tell that the sheets were missing. Then I snuck down in the basement, the quietest I could, to try to clean my clothes and sheets. I actually got pretty good at doing the laundry at a young age.

Finally, I overcame this. Now, I only piss the bed when I have too much vodka.

SURVIVING

Back in the day, we used to play in these big local football games for 7th grade for Pop Warner. These games were a little different than you might expect from a bunch of middle school kids. They weren’t just games, they became an outlet to settle all kinds of neighborhood rivalry stuff. Then, it got so bad that the games weren’t resolving our issues but were causing new ones. Many of the games ended in big brawls.

We took those games personally. If one of my crew walked through the Dominican neighborhood during the week, they knew they would get jumped, and vice versa. The problem was, I had to walk through it every

day just to get to school. My strategy seemed to work for the most part. When I had to walk through it, I ran as fast as I could. By the time any of them saw me, it was usually too late. I was gone. My survival strategy worked. They only caught me once.

One morning, I had just crossed what we called “The Magic Bridge.” One our side, everyone was white or Mexican, but the moment you crossed it, everyone was Dominican. I was just starting to pick up steam, and then saw a speed bump approach in front of me — then another, and another.

It looked like a scene out of the movie *The Warriors*. A bunch of them just started popping up out of nowhere right in front of me, just as I crossed the invisible border of our two territories. They had to have been waiting for me like they had figured out my routine. I had barely even worked up any speed, yet, and there he was. I was looking at the very same Dominican we had beat the shit out of at last week’s game.

“Yo man,” said the tall skinny kid with bad teeth and even worse breath. He bent down and got in my face, and it reeked like rotten eggs and wet garbage. “Where you going in such a hurry?”

“Ain’t you one of the players?” his even uglier buddy asked.

I didn’t answer.

I turned around and looked for an escape route. A few more of their team had crept up from behind me. I was surrounded. My heart pounded inside my chest. I swallowed hard. There was no way out.

“Yo. You think it’s funny to trip one of us like that in the game?”

“You’re wrong, man,” I said. “That wasn’t me.”

“Oh, but I think it was,” he said, with another blast that this time smelled like that hot, gross salad subway stink that comes up from the grate in the city.

I honestly didn’t know what he was talking about, but I wasn’t going to argue with him. His circle of thugs started to tighten. I kept eye contact the best I could but had to know what I was dealing with. I turned my shoulders a little and guessed I was dealing with at least seven guys, maybe eight.

“You know what really sucks?”

“Um, your breath?”

They didn’t like my joke. They also didn’t like our team, and I knew I was going to be the example of that hatred.

Immediately, they ganged up on me.

I felt the bony knuckles of a fist in my face. I saw purple stars. I dropped, but jumped right back up, swinging. I hit the big guy as hard as I could, trying to break his nose. Before I could tell if I was successful, my legs gave out from a sharp kick in my back. Then, all eight guys started to stomp a mud hole in me.

Across the street, someone watched as eight angry Dominicans were beating the living shit out of me. Before they could do some real damage, a new body entered the circle.

Now every morning on my way to school, I would pass this one porch just before the magic bridge. Quite often, I would see this karate guy there, doing his morning stretches. I loved Kung Fu movies, so I would always nod at him, picturing that he was about to start some crazy training like I would see on TV with all the high kicks and the breaking of the boards. He would always nod back.

Maybe it was the nodding, or maybe he just didn't like the odds, but either way, he jumped in to break up the mess I had gotten myself into.

The circle opened and backed off a second. I got up to my knees and tried to position myself back-to-back with him like you see in the movies, so we could fight them off together. But that didn't matter. Honestly, we were all about thirteen, and he was probably thirty. He started spinning and doing all these kicks. The dumbasses didn't take heed to his warnings and charged him. That was a big mistake.

Then, each Dominican dog came in and took a shot. On impact, it seemed like to me that each one he kicked flew up ten feet in the air like a ragdoll, before hitting the ground and then scurrying off. After he nailed the last one, the whole pack went running down the street crying to their mommies, with their tails between their legs.

"Thanks, man," I said, as he helped me back up off the ground.

"Can I offer you some advice," he said.

"Sure," I said, checking for a fat lip.

"Take your shoes off when you run," he said, pointing at my worn dress shoes. "You can run faster."

Mimi looked Asian, but I honestly didn't know where he was from. I told the rest of my boys how he beat up those eight guys, and he quickly became known as our own neighborhood Bruce Lee. For the next few months, he showed me and some of our team some really cool kicks and punches. My

mother didn’t want me to talk to him, but I still did on the sly. He helped show me some moves, and they really worked when you were in a jam.

I would still see him practicing stretching on porch most mornings, as I approached the magic bridge. I would nod. He would nod back. Sometimes as a show of respect, I would even take off my shoes on his steps, to start my run through the danger zone. He smiled as I took off.

When junior high school rolled around, there was no hesitation. I immediately enrolled in wrestling. I wrestled for five years straight, from junior high school right into high school. I wasn’t exactly doing it to learn how to protect myself, though that bonus certainly didn’t hurt. I was rather training in hopes to prepare myself to maybe one day be good enough to be a pro wrestler, like the only father figure I really had: my uncle.

Eventually, the hard work started to pay off. I was beginning to get in shape. It was then that I began thinking that standing up to my older brothers could eventually be a possibility. When wrestling ended, I started playing baseball and football. I monitored my own progress. I was getting a little stronger and a little faster within each season, because of the training that went along with it. At school, there were also a couple of spats out on the field, but never like the Dominicans at Pop Warner. Being a little older and knowing even more moves from Mimi and from wrestling, I handled myself even better for those fights. Seeing my odds increase little by little that I could maybe soon stand up to my brothers and possibly win, whatever sport was in season, I decided to play in it.

The day finally came that I felt was confident enough to show my brothers I wasn’t going to take any of their nonsense anymore. When the opportunity came, I took full advantage of it. They started in on me one day over something so silly that I can’t even remember what it was. Then, all those pent up years of losing the fight rushed at me and hit me like a brick wall, and then I decided to hit back.

I had been waiting for that day. I had that moment calculated. I let John think I was still the same shy, weak kid I always was. So when he put me in a headlock for the last time and I broke the hold, I almost broke his nose.

WHAM!

Finally, I let him have it. I almost knocked John out cold, and then Chris came running over for the save. Maybe he realized that his advantage was slipping, and he wouldn’t have a kid brother to push around anymore.

Maybe he just wanted some himself, I don’t know. Just trying to be the fair brother that I am, I gave the same thing to Chris.

That was it. After that, they never touched me again. They saw that my body and skills had finally caught up with all my years studying wrestling. That combination worked for me. It was an epic coming-of-age moment like in all of those cheesy ‘80s teen movies, but it was real. The days of being a punching-bag pushover were over. They learned the hard way that I had achieved the ability to beat them both up at the same time. I was no longer a little “kid.”

CONFIDENCE

My new found confidence was both good and bad. While I was still looked at as being the “shy, quiet good guy,” I started being the one who was actually picking fights in school more. Soon, I learned that I was pretty good at fighting. After realizing that I could get away with more bad stuff, I started hanging around with more bad kids, and we really started to push the limits of what we shouldn’t do.

They say, “birds of a feather flock together,” and they are right. I started out as an “eagle eye” for a group of kids who liked to steal. I became the “lookout” of sorts — like a wingman for thieves. My buddies would try and steal something, and I would act as a distraction. I would go up to a clerk and ask some stupid question or whatever. They would be looking at me, maybe trying to help me find some product. They wouldn’t be looking at the other people in the background, who were clearly robbing them blind. In no time at all, my buddy flying out of there, free and in the clear, walking right out the door. It was just like Jane’s Addiction.

Once I saw how easy it was, I wanted in.

Baby steps.

The first thing I stole was a fucking candy bar. Even though you might think that it could be difficult to swipe something so close to the register, that stuff was easy. You could time it just right, maybe when the cashier was ringing something up. They never knew what hit them.

Stealing has been around forever. At this point in time, however, retailers didn't have the technology that they have today. Cameras were far and few between. There were no sort of security tags even invented yet. All that stuff was created after asshole little punks like us came along.

Come the very late 70s into the early 80s was the first big wave of electronic games. There were a number of handheld games before the home arcade systems came out. Before that, though, we all had to go to the arcades to get our fix. We would go play pinball, Pacman and Donkey Kong, this one cool Star Wars game I liked where you would blow up the Death Star, but the thing was you had to feed these machines quarters that I didn't have.

I made a little bit of money back then, but in just a few hours in an arcade, and I would be completely broke.

Since we rode our bikes everywhere back then, I was a paperboy some as a kid. I was able to make some money that way. My mom also got me a job where she worked at a restaurant called *Rocky's Teakwood* that my cousin owned. They sold both Lebanese and American food. I worked there from age seven to probably around eighteen, doing any damn thing they needed. I washed the floors, scrubbed dishes. Eventually, they even would make me head chef, from years of my mom slowly teaching me how to cook. (I can still make some really good Lebanese food to this very day.)

Soon enough, my big thing became stealing the new electronic games from the mall so I didn't have pay any quarters. Ironically, the first one I stole was a handheld electronic football game from Coleco called *Mr. Quarterback.*

The floodgates lifted. Stealing immediately became an obsession. I started taking things just to see if I could get away with it. Much like my future wrestling obsession, with this pastime came an adrenaline surge that is really hard to describe. I started stealing to quench those feelings of excitement and curiosity all the time. I would get that feeling, and then also have the item as my reward after the heist. At first, I never got caught red-handed, because I was super careful about doing it when nobody would see me. The handheld games were easy. I would just lift up my shirt and push it down into the crotch of my pants. They were small enough, so it wasn't tough to conceal my prizes. However, like any other addiction, you push more and more.

The snowball grew.

After the handheld games, I moved on to the home systems. The boxes that the Atari and ColecoVision home arcade consoles came in were huge. It was like trying to smuggle a VCR out in my jacket, but I did it.

The risk of getting caught started to go up. As a kid, you don’t think much. I never really connected with a whole lot of people back then, so I didn’t have any of those moments where I had an angel on one shoulder and the devil on the other arguing whether or not I should do something. I never much thought about how the owner would feel about what I did or say anything like, "Is this is morally wrong?" to myself. I knew it was bad, but that didn't mean anything to me if I didn't get caught. It was almost like a game and I would compete with my friends.

I remember this one time me and my friends wanted to steal the new updated Atari 5200 Super System. The box it came in was humongous. I knew I was going to have to be inventive and come up with an innovative way to get that out of the store without paying. My boys couldn’t even believe what I did.

I took a deep breath. Then, I just walked into the store, put the box in a cart, and then wheeled it right out the door. I had some lame alibi in my head that I am sure didn’t make any sense, but I didn’t need to use it. My theory, at least that time, was right. I was hiding in open sight. When I got outside and far enough away from the mall, my three friends all high-fived me.

“See?” I told them. “If it looks like what you are doing is right, nobody questions you. Since I didn’t act scared, they probably thought I had already paid for it, or something.”

After that, we started doing all kinds of brazen shit. We would walk behind a counter and take new watches out from under the glass. We would leave our crappy old sneakers behind in a box and walk out wearing new ones.

It was often a competition between my friends to see who could take the most, and sometimes I would just shoplift all day alone on autopilot. For a short period of time, we did it every day, maybe sometimes twenty to thirty times! We would just move from shop to shop, taking stuff we needed, what stuff we didn’t. Part of it was definitely the thrill of seeing what we could get away with.

As long as I could leave with something, all was good. It didn’t really matter what it was. The more I got, the better the high. I've did it hundreds of times before I finally got caught stealing a stupid t-shirt. They called my mom, and she came down to the security office in the department store to get me. Since they let me go on a warning, I didn’t skip a beat. I was right back to it again. No, I'm not proud. I knew it was wrong, and I actually felt bad that I had upset my mother for letting her down. I didn’t feel bad enough to stop, though.

I got caught probably five more times after that. It was always the same thing. I wasn’t even sixteen yet, so they couldn’t do a whole lot with me. They would call my mother and then ultimately just give me a slap on the wrist. My mom would yell at me all week, then she would bring me to my uncle who would yell at me all weekend.

It didn’t matter though. I kept at it.

One day, I was walking down the street going out to steal. I had a special gym bag with me that I used for stealing. I was almost to the mall when all of a sudden, I was getting pulled over and I wasn’t even driving.

“You are Terry, right?”

I kept walking, looking down at the grass and some garbage on the side of the road by my feet.

“Look, man, this is about your mom,” he said, leaning over a shouting out the passenger window.

“My mom,” I asked, stopping in my tracks. “Is she okay?”

“We don’t know exactly what is happening,” he said. “She’s not at home. There’s a problem. Can you get in?”

“Okay,” I said.

Reluctantly, I climbed into the back seat of the squad car. The police officer was vague enough that he didn’t lie, but he made it seem like she was missing or something. Even though I had a little bit of doubt, I didn’t really think the spotlight was on me. After all, I had willingly got into the backseat. He didn’t push me in.

When we got down to the station, my mother was right there waiting. It was some kind of intervention. They blamed me for breaking into a firework store. I was pissed! I mean, I had done it, but they had the wrong dates, and times and everything, so technically it didn’t count!

Because they couldn’t really get me for the fireworks store, they brought up the other six times I got caught. They decided I needed to see what a real punishment was going to look like because I was almost old enough for jail. They offered to put me in the slammer for four days, and actually sleep there with my mother’s permission. She agreed.

It was still daylight when I watched my mother shake her head and leave. Going through the arrest procedure in a police station is one of the most demoralizing things that can happen to you. They took a mug shot. They took off my belt. They took my shoelaces. They took my stuff and put it all into a large plastic bag. I was pushed into the back of a police van and the doors banged shut.

After the walk of shame, I sat alone behind a heavy locked door. I had an ugly toilet with no seat and a hard bench hanging off the wall, opposite a creaky cot. As afternoon became night three times, I had never felt so lonely in all my life. After an eternity, behind those bars, my mother finally came. She hugged me. I could tell she had been crying. That’s when the full enormity of what I had done to her really hit me. I knew I needed to change.

The next day, one of my buddies called me on the phone. He told me that he was going to steal a car. I don’t know if my mom heard our conversation, but soon after that is when she came up with the idea to watch some video.

So, I watched this show called “Scared Straight,” because my mom asked me too. There was a recent revival of this show, but I saw the original one, which was even more horrific. Now, my stay at the jail was just boring as hell, but this show had all kinds of interaction with terrible inmates — more than I would have wanted. I watched as a group of troubled kids got screamed at by some of the scariest, nastiest prisoners I had ever seen in my life.

That tape was all I needed. I retired on the spot.

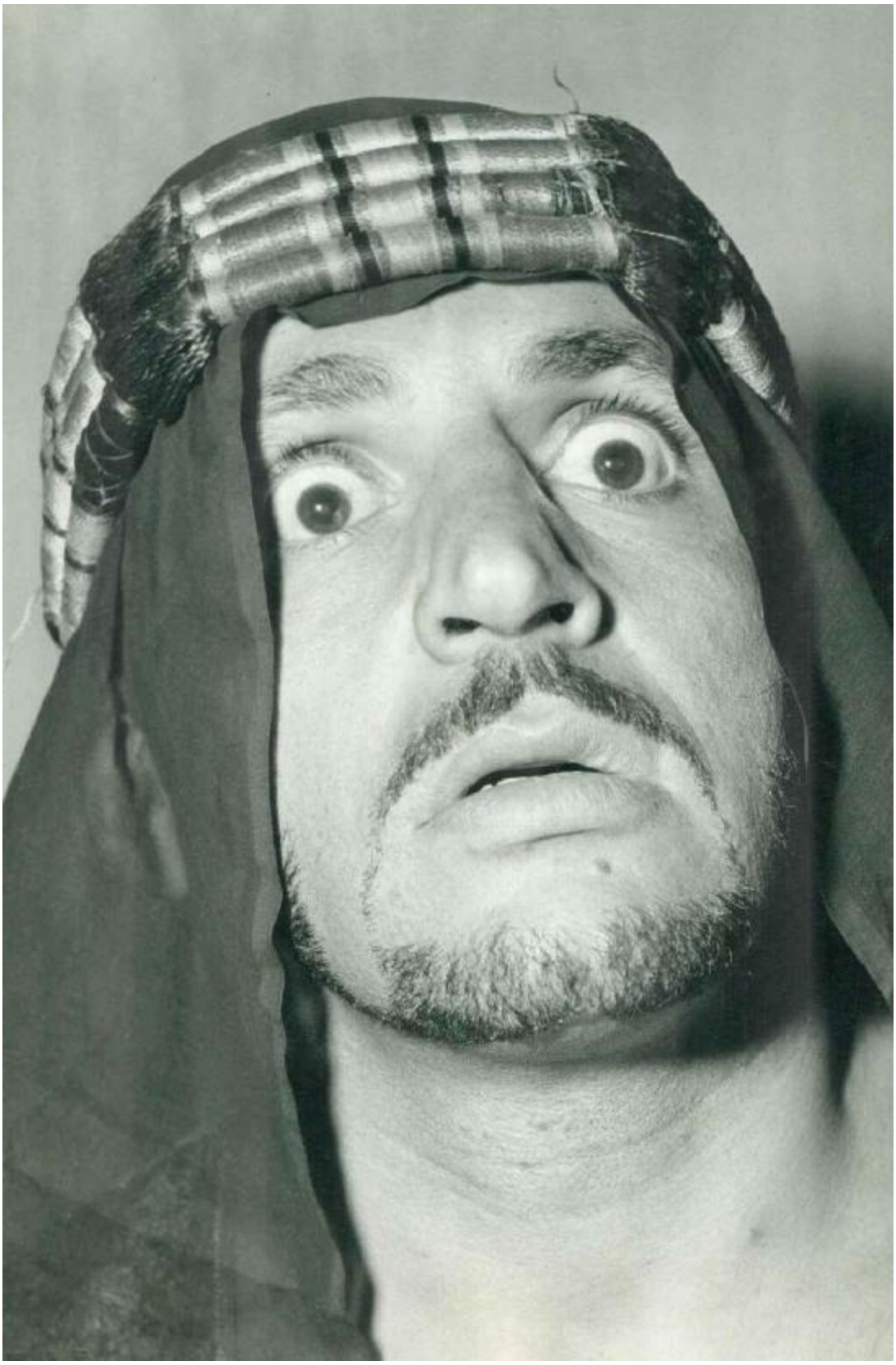
I severed all ties with my crime crew. A few days later, I got word that the guy I was supposed to go steal that car with, *he got caught.* He’s been in and out of jail ever since.

After that, I started hanging drywall to make an extra buck here and there. Hanging drywall absolutely sucks. I hated it, but I liked making honest money. The hours were long and the work was hard. But at least I wasn’t in jail.

I had learned my lesson.



The Mother of Hardcore.



CHAPTER 2 – THE SHEIK

Lansing, Michigan was home of one of the best heels in the history of professional wrestling — *The Sheik.* In order to understand me and where I came from, you have to also first learn about him. (This will make more sense later on.)

My mother's brother, Ed Farhat, was born in 1924. He came from a pretty big family and had to deal with some survival, as well. As my mother was, he was one of ten children. Their parents were Lebanese immigrants and didn't have a whole lot growing up.

My uncle scrapped and clawed his way through his childhood. After fighting a bunch in the streets, it only made sense that he went out and fought for our country. So following his recruitment to fight in World War II, he was then recruited by a wrestling promoter. He went straight from serving for the US Army to the wrestling ring. His first real gig was on one of the earliest channels in television.

Television was still a baby back then. One company called "Dumont Broadcasting" was one of the world's first commercial networks. Starting out in the mid-40s, this company was the only real competitor to NBC and CBS, and it really was among the very first TV channels you could see nationwide everywhere. Needing good content that was cheap to produce, Dumont was the first one to discover that wrestling was a great fit for television at that time.

Back then, you see, you only really needed two good cameras, and someone to pick the shots. There was no real editing, lighting, or heavy production needed. Everything was just shot live as it happened. Therefore, the live coverage of matches was easy to air and a good fit for the channel needing content. The first airings were matches shot under the banner of the Capitol Wrestling Corporation, which was the predecessor to WWE. As a TV show, the wrestling program did very well. It appeared in 20 percent of all households. Dumont capitalized from that success by offering weekly wrestling shows to the rest of the country.

My uncle got his first break wrestling for Capitol in Chicago at Marigold Gardens. Using cartoony stereotypes in wrestling was a very easy way to hook fans in. It became a very common gimmick in the ring for many wrestlers — one that still remains even to this day as one of the biggest

money makers. This is why he originally called himself the “Sheik of Araby.”

He probably didn’t know it at the time, but he would make a lifetime career off of this idea. He began his wrestling career in 1951 as The Sheik, and he continued to perform in this role until the mid-’90s when he was seventy years old, as he began to pass his torch over to me.

Again, his character was instantly hate-able from the start, which was exactly what he wanted. He was a foreigner on American soil and against the American way in a time that immediately followed World War II. He wore Middle Eastern gear, stabbed people with pencils, and threw fire in people’s faces. He also was billed as coming from a wealthy, aristocratic Middle Eastern family. This angered fans without a whole lot of money even more who often had to scrape up the cash to buy tickets for the wrestling show in the first place. To create even more heat, he eventually worked elements of insanity into his personality. He eventually morphed into being a maniacal madman from Syria. All these elements made for really great TV!

In order to make a living off of this gimmick, he decided to really live his gimmick. That meant he took on the persona in almost every facet of his life, both inside the ring and out. This meant that when the cameras stopped rolling and the lights stopped shining, Ed Farhat was not coming back; he was still always The Sheik. Even at home, if I called him “Uncle Ed,” he stopped answering. Eventually, his own family all called him “Sheik,” or he wouldn’t show us the time of day. I never called him “Uncle Ed.” Never. Even his little grandchildren had to call him “Grandpa Sheik.”

The Sheik’s ring entrance really was awesome. It set the mood. To piss off the wrestling fans, he was acting as un-American as possible. He unrolled a carpet, lit incense, and sometimes charmed a snake right in the ring. After a ceremonial prayer, he would then point toward the sky in praise to Allah. (This, of course, is where I eventually would inherit my trademark gesture/pose in the ring as a tribute.)

The Sheik looked the part of an anti-American villain, too, sparing no expense to get it right. Once I was old enough to know who he was, I was fascinated with everything about him. On TV, he would always come to the ring with tons of these expensive shiny robes. He also had camel-embroidered tights and boots that he would turn into a weapon by tapping

the toe somehow. I remember one Thanksgiving, sneaking up the stairs in his house hoping to get a look in his closet, just to see some Sheik stuff.

Being a student of the sport, I really needed to get a look at his gear up close.

I excused myself to the "bathroom." After snooping around while my family downstairs was passing around the pumpkin pie, I finally found a stash of his wrestling clothing hanging in the back of his closet. I removed a robe with great care like I had just found a lost national treasure. After inspecting it for some time, I finally tried it on. I stood on a large cedar hope chest to see myself on a mirror on the wall.

Something is missing.

I got down and started looking in the drawers for the final piece of the puzzle. "Socks … underwear … Nothing."

When I was almost finally ready to give up, I cracked open the chest itself. Bingo. There, I removed one of his traditional headdresses (called a *keffiyeh* or *ghutrah* in the Middle East) as well as an "agal" cord to wrap it with.

Panicking for a minute, I looked around like a junkie trying to get a fix. I knew they would be calling for me soon, so I had to act fast. I quickly put the material on my head and fastened it with the band. Then, I hopped back up on my perch to take a look in the mirror.

I looked at my reflection and smiled at my find.

"Terry!" a voice said loudly, under her breath.

I dove down off of the big wooden box and disrobed faster than a hungry Chippendale.

"Sorry Aunt, Joyce," I said in total fear, trying to put away the contraband. "Please! You won't tell him, will you?"

The Sheik was often accompanied to the ring by my Aunt Joyce, who he called his servant. He ring name was "Princess Salima." Years before Randy Savage would mistreat his valet, Miss Elizabeth, The Sheik "abused" his slave woman, during his entrance to piss off the audience. The fans always booed when they saw this evil man pushing his woman around, and would scream when she finally submitted to his wishes, kneeling at his feet. While he didn't go that far at home, it was obvious that she didn't want him to know what had just happened.

Aunt Joyce ushered me out of the room, and down the staircase without another word about it.

“Please don’t,” I said, terrified at the thoughts entering my head. Having watched too many Saturday morning cartoons like *Tom & Jerry*, I pictured the worst.

“Sheik,” my Aunt might say, holding me by the arm pulling me back to the Thanksgiving table. “You will never guess who I found in the room trying on your clothes.”

I pictured everyone around the table who had been smiling stopping in unison and scowling at me like they just smelled a bad shit.

“You little son of a bitch!” The Sheik would say, leaping over the turkey carcass and flying right at me. I would fumble around the house, tripping over furniture, looking for an exit. But all the doors were locked from the inside!

Just before he got me, he reached over to the desk in the living room and grabbed a large number two pencil.

“This will teach you to touch my stuff!”

“*Nooo!*”

But… that’s not what happened.

When we got down to the dinner table, my aunt helped me into my seat and kayfabed the whole thing.

“Would you like some ice cream?” she asked.

I looked up into her eyes and nodded.

“Strawberry, or chocolate?”

Growing up, I did know he was special. When my friends would finally make the connection that wrestling was in my family, the first question they would ask would be, “Is your uncle The Sheik?” The follow-up question was always then, “Well, is wrestling fake?”

Early on, I didn’t even know how to answer that. I didn’t know how it worked, because even I always thought my uncle was real.

I thought maybe in professional wrestling, “maybe you could have a choice.” My uncle never said that he was working. He never called wrestling “a work.” That is why I almost never use that term, even today.

WITHOUT A WORD

Backing things up again a little, The Sheik's entire presentation of himself translated to gold in the ring. He won his first championship in 1953 as one-half of the Midwest tag team champions with a guy named Gypsy Joe. A year later, he beat Johnny Valentine for his first singles championship, the Texas heavyweight title. (Later in 1965, he would feud with Valentine for Detroit's United States belt, a title he would hold twelve times over the next twelve years.)

My uncle was a great showman. To add to the mysticism around his character, he never ever spoke. His body language alone got him over; he never picked up a microphone. Fans maybe thought this action meant he felt he was above everyone else to even converse with anyone beneath him. The silent treatment really added to the mystery of who he was.

The power of The Sheik's ominous silence filled fans with terror. With only an occasional gibberish version of Arabic, The Sheik was mostly silent his whole career, and my uncle as himself was also mostly quiet when in public.

There was one exception to the vow of silence he took, however. It was on Rich Little's show *You Asked for It*. In 1981, in one particular episode that featured The Sheik, they interviewed "Promoter Ed Farhat" who played a character that was not The Sheik but was rather someone else talking about him. He was filmed as a separate person off camera and spoke in a scary voice.

"The guy that goes into the ring with The Sheik has to first of all fear for his life," my uncle said. "Because he's going to hit you with fire, or he's going to boot you to death, or he's going to pull out that little object he has always hidden away and poke away at you. I mean, he doesn't like anyone, and he doesn't want anyone to like him."

Even though his actions in the ring spoke louder than words, to keep up this charade sometimes The Sheik would come to the ring with a manager to do his speaking for him. These included the Abdullah Farouk who was

also known as the turban-clad, sunglass-wearing Grand Wizard of Wrestling (Ernie Roth), Eddie Creatchman, or even Dave “The Super-mouth” Drason.

While you don’t see managers now as much on television other than maybe Paul and Brock, they were a huge part of wrestling’s early years. Having a manager as a mouthpiece was perfect for The Sheik to get a message across, and to still protect his mysterious, voiceless persona.

Without a manager in tow, Sheik’s evil tag partner, Gypsy Joe, often acted like one. Joe always helped get my uncle over and did all his talking for him. After working the territorial system like a gypsy himself, The Sheik eventually got a big solo break to wrestle in singles competition for the most coveted championship there was of that time, *the NWA World Heavyweight Championship.*

LOU THESZ SNOW JOB

Booked in what was to be The Sheik’s biggest match up until that point, the big fight in Chicago was for the most coveted title in the sport against one of the greatest, Lou Thesz. However, before the match even happened, my uncle had caught word backstage that Thesz had plans for him during their match, because he hated gimmick wrestlers.

Back in the territorial days, it was a bit like the Wild, Wild West. Quite often, the “anything goes” mentality came into play. Matches were not highly-choreographed or scripted. The NWA champion was often selected because of his ability to “shoot” when necessary. See, sometimes, the champion had to deal with an opponent that would “go into business for himself,” meaning act in a certain way that that was only beneficial for him. There were cases where an opponent of a small territory would actually attempt to beat the NWA champion for real, to get noticed and put their promotion on the map. Because of this potential, the champion had to really be a guy who could handle himself in the ring for real, just in case one of his opponents tried to pull some funny business.

Lou Thesz was a legitimate tough guy and didn’t take any nonsense. He didn’t play around with cartoony characters. He really hated gimmicks. Therefore, days before the big match, word had it that he was planning to

make an example of my uncle if he tried any of his theatrics in the ring with him.

It was November 18, 1955, at the International Amphitheater in Chicago, Illinois. For the fans, it was the tail end of a nasty snowstorm the night The Sheik went to wrestle the then six-time NWA world champion, Lou Thesz.

Before the bout, The Sheik intentionally bumped into Lou in the back.

“So, you don’t like my character?”

“I didn’t say that,” Lou replied.

“Well, what did you say?”

“I said that if you try any of your shit, I am just going to break both of your legs tonight,” he joked.

“Not going to happen,” he said.

The two wrestlers entered the ring. The Sheik went through all of his pre-match rituals, and the NWA Champion watched, rubbing his hands together like one of those green shit-eating flies. There was a real quick fall, then, before they could even lock up, my uncle rolled right out of the ring.

The Sheik taunted Lou.

“What did I tell you?” the champion said.

Then there was a chase. The audience watched in amazement as The Sheik ran around the ring, out into the crowd, and right out of the building into a blizzard.

The crowd followed Lou into the middle of a street in the snowstorm, after my uncle. Seeing a parked bus that couldn’t move due to a few feet of snow surrounding it, The Sheik ran to its side and started digging with his hands like a woodchuck. He quickly dug a hole, and by the time Lou Thesz caught up to him and made it through the crowd of people, he burrowed underneath the bus.

He stayed there for three hours!

Obviously getting counted out and losing the match wasn’t everything. The show continued after the event. Police turned out along with EMTs and fire engines. News reporters came to cover the strange occurrence for their respective papers, and people from all around the city swarmed to see what was going on.

The next day, my uncle’s actions became headline news all over the country, “The Sheik, Wildman from Syria, hides from his opponent under bus in Chicago!”

At this point in time, Lou had actually come to appreciate all the attention that little stunt had done for him, as well. His name was in all the papers, and people really believed that he must have been that tough for his opponent to act in such a manner.

“You liked it then?”

“Boy, you had a lot of guts to do what you did,” Lou laughed. Behind the scenes, they eventually became good friends. After that, they worked a number of matches together all around the country and drew great money.

My cousin, “Captain” Ed Farhat, Jr. has said in interviews that the publicity from that big match (and their rematches) elevated The Sheik to even new heights. He said that the phone literally started ringing off the hook from promoters all around the world, looking to bring his father in to their promotions. By the way, my cousin (The Sheik’s son) eventually got into the business, but by himself. He was just too lazy to ever train with his father, the Sheik, the way I did.

In a day before viral videos and the internet, his reputation preceded itself. In an attempt to outdo himself every event and keep the ball rolling, he really started to raise the measuring stick. Fans had come to expect something crazy out of him, so in order to not disappoint and to continue to get booked in all these far away territories to increase his brand, he had to really go the extra mile.

Eventually, Sheik bumped up the violence-level a notch, or two ...or maybe ten! I remember watching some of his matches and thinking to myself, “Geesh, nobody is safe during one of his matches anymore, not even the ref.”

As in any war, you sometimes risked getting hit with shrapnel, this is just one of the risks you would have to take in the ring. This was even more so with The Sheik on your enemy line. He wouldn’t only attack you, he would hit you, your mother, and innocent bystanders, too.

It wasn’t rare for him to ransack a ring announcer, or clothesline a cameraman. He didn’t think twice about dropkicking a commentator or tapping out a timekeeper. He would even fuck with the fans. Anyone could find themselves in the onslaught of The Sheik’s offense and that is what made him so unpredictable in the ring, but also fun to watch.

The Sheik made sure to include multiple unorthodox elements into each one of his matches, instead of just one or two. When he amped his character

up to be more “violence-personified”, he worked in more of the hair pulling, more biting, more stabbing and more fireballs. He came to be known for leaving the ring-soiled in red wherever he wrestled. It was always a bloodbath. After a Sheik-fight, it often looked like someone had road-killed a bison right there on the canvass.

Dory Funk Jr. tells the story of a match he had once with The Sheik in Lubbock, Texas. He explained that The Sheik pulled a sulfurous substance out of his tights and threw a big red-and-orange ball of fire at him. After the match, he went back to the dressing room and saw that the fireball wasn’t the only thing that was red and orange. His eyebrows were singed and he had scalding on his face.

“Even though the fans protested against The Sheik that night,” Dory said, “every future appearance of The Sheik in Texas was sold out.”

Eventually, The Sheik’s formula for success was created. With no words, he would bring the violence, and when he was done, he would be dumping buckets of blood in the ring.

In matches with another known wrestler to make a living off of bloodletting named Abdullah the Butcher, The Sheik took their match out of the arena and into the streets. They held up traffic, hitting each other with pencils, forks, street cones, and broken bottles until the police finally came broke it up.

The Sheik didn’t know it at the time, but he was a pioneer. He was laying the groundwork and influencing a future generation. He was creating hardcore wrestling as far back as the 1960s, with his crazy, unheard of use of barbed wire, fire, and a whole odd assortment of innovative use of foreign objects as weapons.

He started getting booked everywhere from word-of-mouth on his name alone.

At first, when a promoter who had never booked him before saw what he was doing in the ring, they didn’t understand it at all. They would watch his match and think about not using him again because he was too wild for them. However, after getting the gate receipts and numbers after the show, they would realize that he was actually becoming a bigger and bigger draw, every time they used him.

JAPAN

At this point, The Sheik's reputation was horrible, in a good way. Before he even got into the ring, people were throwing fists and trying to get at him in the aisle. His entrances more and more looked like security trying to stop a riot. The funny thing is, this happened everywhere, even in the most peaceful of audiences.

Eventually, he found himself going to work in New York for Vincent J. McMahon, the father of the one you see on television today. There, he wrestled for the first time in Madison Square Garden, where he would soon feud with one of the biggest in the world, Bruno Sammartino. Immediately after appearing under such a big spotlight, he was being booked to appear for an even bigger promotion at that time, overseas.

My uncle told me about his debut match in Japan. It was a sellout. The word about his appearance in their country translated to ticket sales. The Japanese fans had done their homework. They had seen pictures of him in their magazines and knew exactly who he was.

The Sheik got all geared up and ready for his first fight for Antonio Inoki in New Japan Pro Wrestling. He was backstage in a strange world and wondered how well his anti-American gimmick would translate in Japan.

In a classic case of curiosity killing the cat, he walked around behind the curtains to take a peek. Because a line of piled up chairs was between both him and his view stacked directly against the dividing fabric, he actually had to step around them and outside the blinders for a moment, in order to see what was going on. In that short amount of time, a fan spotted him.

"*Sheeeeiiikkk!!!*" the fan cried, pointing him out to his friends. He picked up his chair and launched it at the entranceway, where my uncle was hiding behind the cloth. In order to avoid being hit, he had to jump out from behind the curtain, run down the edge of the line of chairs, and then duck back into safety.

It was too late. A big portion of the audience saw how the thrown chair brought out The Sheik, and the fan's action went viral. Catching on immediately like a brush fire, that whole section of people went berserk. They all started throwing their chairs at him.

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

Now, the thing that really makes this story so crazy is that Japanese fans are usually harmless. If you have ever seen a Japanese match, you know that they are usually so reserved that they don't even boo or cheer. They just clap. However, these Japanese fans threw all of their manners out the window at the very sight of The Sheik.

I don't know what they heard to cause that kind of reaction, but whatever it was, they were buying his anti-American persona in a country that was once our enemy! Amazing, right? His legend alone evoked anger from crowds that didn't even know him.

WORKING WITH EVERYONE

Back in America, The Sheik was being booked against a who's who in professional wrestling.

One of his first stops back was for the WWWF to finish some unfinished business. For his title matches against their champion in around 1968, Bruno Sammartino took him to the next level.

Three more huge houses at MSG further put The Sheik on the map. My uncle won his first match by count out. In their next, he lost by disqualification in the rematch. And then he finally submitted, losing to Bruno in a Texas Death Match by submission.

Their third bout at Madison Square Garden had The Sheik written all over it. In the finish, Bruno grabbed a foreign object and held it high in the air. It was a fountain ink pen. In a "turnabout is fair play" kind of measure, the "Living Legend" repeatedly pin-holed The Sheik's arm into a bloody mess, over and over again until he quit. Bruno and Sheik also battled big matches in Boston, including one impressive sellout show that took place the day after a massive snowstorm. The thing that really made this notable was that there was no means of public transportation to even get to the building, but fans still came. People were snowshoeing and dog sledding their way to the arena for all I know, braving the worst of elements possible just to see the match.

In addition to working with Bruno Sammartino in the WWWF, Sheik also wrestled a whole bunch in Canada. In Toronto alone, The Sheik had an undefeated streak at Maple Leaf Gardens of 127 matches! Within that reign of terror, he defeated all the big names of that time including Billy Watson, Lou Thesz, Gene Kiniski, Édouard Carpentier, Ernie Ladd, Chief Jay Strongbow, Tiger Jeet Singh, Johnny Valentine. He even beat the living hell out of Andre the Giant on his first tour of North America back in 1974.

BIG TIME WRESTLING IN DETROIT

The Sheik had created himself the ability to draw. His marketability served him well, making him a lot of money on the road. He performed all over the world, wherever they had wrestling. He became a box-office draw for many regional promoters willing to pay for a sellout.

The Sheik had a family, however. Rather than travel everywhere to collect the money and only make money for others, he decided to try to stay home and make money for himself. That is when he decided to put together his own Michigan-based company, and throw his name in the hat for promoting shows.

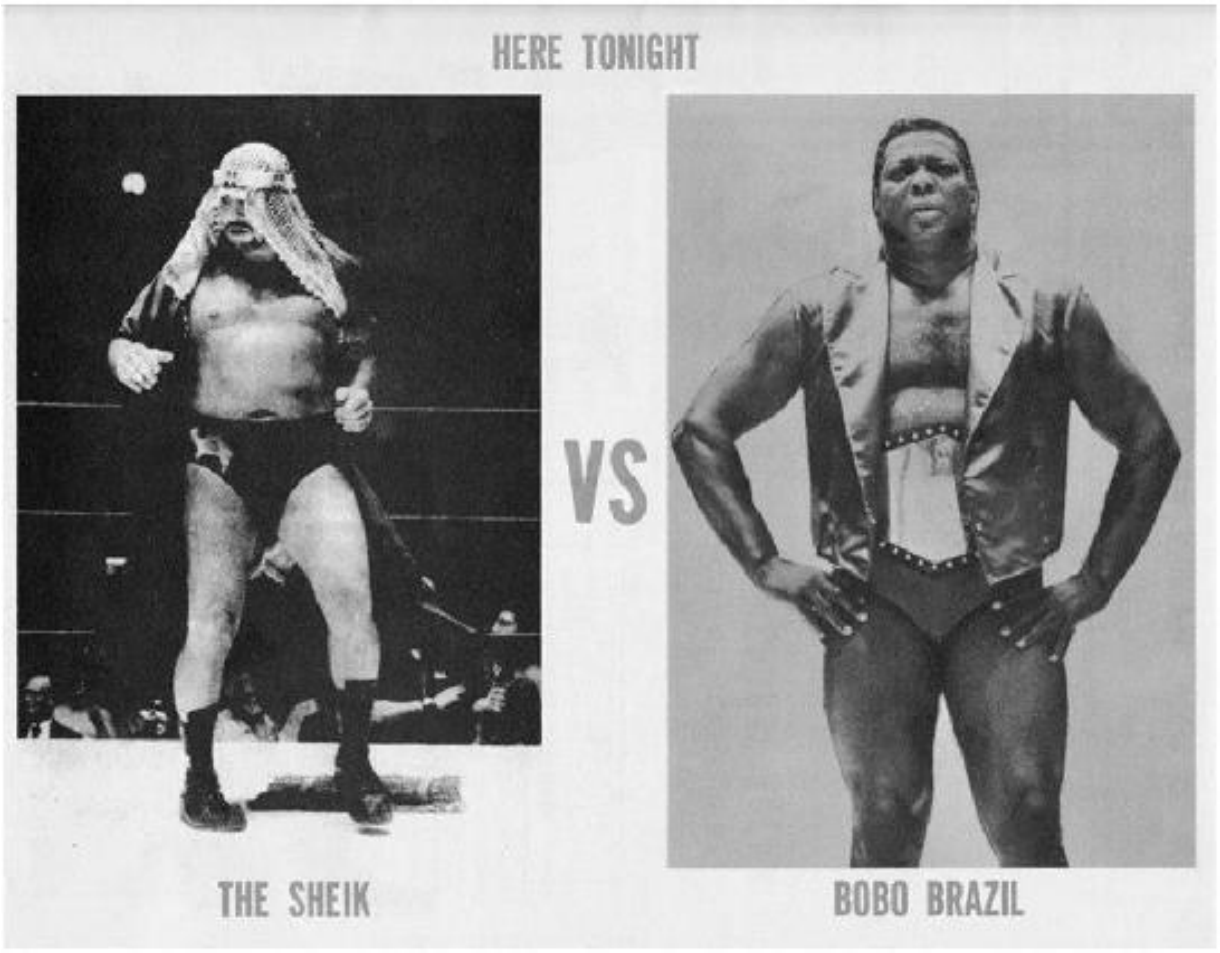
By the early 1960s, The Sheik was homebound. He returned to Detroit determined to create his own promotion and cut out the middlemen. He went about doing so within the normal territorial means of the time. Not stepping on anyone's toes, in 1964 he bought a piece of Jim Barnett's Midwestern NWA territory. Covering Detroit, and small parts of Montreal and Ohio, Big Time Wrestling was ready to go.

Way, way before Vince McMahon sold out the Silverdome with Hulk Hogan and Andre the Giant at WrestleMania III, my uncle started selling out Cobo Arena with no words and a number two pencil. "The Sheik drew more fans and sold more tickets in more places for a longer period of time than anyone else in the sport's history," says Jim Cornette.

All of The Sheik's matches were very much like that headliner at WrestleMania III. Fans knew going in that Hogan and Andre's wrestling

ability wasn't going to steal the show. It was about hope, and it was about fear. It was the fans' anticipation that they were about to see something amazing that filled the seats. In Detroit, it was about seeing The Sheik punch a guy right in front of you, or maybe about going home with some of The Sheik's blood on your program.

Terry Funk once said, "If you could guarantee that on a Saturday night at the Cobo Arena in Detroit that a man is going to get gored to death, you'd be sitting there with a complete sellout crowd." So that is just what Sheik did. While my uncle didn't give any guarantees, he came pretty damn close by setting expectations. In order to live up to his own name, he brought in some of the biggest names in the game.



SHEIK'S #1 ENEMY, BOBO BRAZIL

The Sheik used to tell this story about how, during the pre-Civil Rights era days, he originally laid the building blocks of a great friendship.

Wrestling in a “good ole’ boys” Texas arena, The Sheik was set to wrestle with a super fan favorite, and one of his own favorite opponents named Bobo Brazil.

He walked down to the ring to his typical chorus of boos. As he stepped up the ring stairs, he looked up to see the reaction from the rabid crowd and noticed before the bout that the arena was segregated. There was a special section set up for black fans way up in the balcony. There the people were seated behind chicken wire like caged animals. He exhaled hard. When he got to the ring and saw the seating set up, he didn’t like it.

After his pre-match rituals, but before the bell, he circled the ring a moment. Before he could even lock up with Bobo, he covered his face with his headdress and gestured to his opponent.

“Stall the ref,” he said under his breath.

The Sheik jumped out of the ring in full Sheik regalia. He pushed his way through the redneck fans and climbed fifteen feet in the air to the balcony seats. He scaled his way across the lip of the riser and tore down the wire.

The audience erupted. He did what he wanted to do, and he didn’t give a shit. The action was two-fold; it pissed off the racist fans in attendance, but it also more so let the black fans feel a little more at home.

The bell rang.

When The Sheik finally got back in the ring and locked up with Bobo Brazil, they were in a position where they could exchange words.

“What the hell did you do?” a shocked Bobo asked.

“Gave those guys a better view,” he replied. “The promoters are racist assholes. To hell with them.”

The two wrestlers battled it out the rest of the match. However, they were laughing at what Sheik had done. Later on, he still got paid by the angry promoters of the segregated South. He simply played his actions off as being part of the show and just a way for The Sheik to bring the heat.

After about 20 years of blood, sweat, and tears, The Sheik summoned his friend Bobo Brazil to work for him at Cobo Arena in Detroit. There, he created a feud with who would become one of his greatest opponents of all time.

Bobo Brazil was perfect for the role. Out of Benton Harbor, Michigan, he was practically a hometown hero whenever he wrestled in Detroit. He was the perfect enemy for my uncle in every way, opposite to him in every way.

He was one of the most famous black athletes of his time, he was loved by his fans, and he was a clean wrestler. He never cheated. He didn't try to kill his opponents in the ring. He would also always offer his hand to his opponents in a show of sportsmanship. He was the Jackie Robinson of wrestling who really paved the way for other black wrestlers after him.

In 1971, The Sheik had a big match with him in front of over 15,000 Big Time Wrestling fans in his main venue, the Cobo Arena. My uncle booked referee, the world-famous boxer Joe Louis to keep things in control. Bobo's career was on the line in a best two-out-of-three pinfall match up.

Bobo broke out of Sheik's signature Camel Clutch and quickly pinned him to win the first fall. Then in the second round, Sheik turned up the heat and busted Bobo open illegally with his pencil. In the big finish, Bobo headbutted The Sheik to the mat. Joe Louis then took the hidden pencil out of The Sheik's boot and gave it to Bobo. The special guest referee then walked slowly to the far corner of the ring, turned his back to the match, and covered his eyes. The audience erupted to Bobo exacting revenge, jabbing Sheik's own pencil over and over into his forehead before pinning him.

Wrestling historian Percival A. Friend said, "After the big match, The Sheik's blood flowed like the mighty Detroit River, just outside the confines of Cobo Arena." Bobo Brazil and my uncle busted each other open many times after that, swapping the Big Time United States Championship back and forth for many years.

The two took their show on the road also to other several markets, including Memphis and Los Angeles. His other major opponent while he was in LA that people remember, was Fred Blassie. They faced off several times, including cage matches in the Grand Olympic Auditorium.

DETROIT FANS

The Detroit fans that The Sheik drew to his promotion, Big Time Wrestling, were crazy and a unique animal unto themselves. He appealed to a basic primal urge. To put it bluntly, the fans that came to see The Sheik wrestle were almost as fucking scary as The Sheik. They were bloodthirsty

in a way that only rivaled Roman gladiator fans. They wanted to see blood and guts and gore in your teeth. Quite often, brawls broke out in Detroit wrestling audiences just over who some fans thought would win in the main event!

Jim Cornette tells a story of just how insane these Detroit fans were. He said that one night they were so upset at Sheik's manager that Eddie Creatchman had to climb to safety and stand on the ring apron just to stay up away from the fans. This pissed the audience off even more. As Sheik and his opponent, Sailor Art Thomas, continued to fight in the ring, a crazy mark jumped up and pulled Creatchman down into the audience. There, fans took turns giving him a Detroit style beat down. Since he was my uncle's mouthpiece, they were essentially killing the messenger.

As it often does, the violence became contagious. Security then jumped the one fan who started it all and beat the shit out of him. The moment they stopped my uncle told Art Thomas "it was time to take it home" and rushed to the finish throwing a big filthy fireball in his face.

THE SHEIK'S MOVIE

The Sheik knew that the Detroit fans were a rare breed and decided to partake in making a movie set within his promotion called, *I Like to Hurt People*. (Go figure; the movie featuring my uncle was originally pitched as being a horror film called *Ringside in Hell.)*

Donald G. Jackson (later known for *Hell Comes To Frogtown*) started filming the movie in the late '70s but ran out of money. Because of this, the footage was shelved until New World Pictures people came along. They decided to help Jackson finish the film as a documentary, adding additional fictional scenes including a crowd of protesters crusading against The Sheik. A funny subplot revolved around a "Stop The Sheik" movement bent on ending the champion's gruesome reign.

While the movie may be kind of cheesy, it had excellent footage of Andre the Giant, Abdullah the Butcher, Terry and Dory Funk, Ox Baker, Little Atlas, and even Dusty Rhodes. It was essentially an eighty-minute fake shoot interview of wrestlers from the Detroit region of the NWA and their shenanigans. (If you're looking for any valuable wrestling history and knowledge about wrestling from this film, you won't find it here. The 91-

minute Director's Cut does contain extra interviews and a very nice country music number, however.)

This campy film, *I Like to Hurt People,* is billed as a documentary but again, it's actually a work. It's silly and old-school and has a ton of legends in it, but it’s cheesy, has terrible acting, it’s ridiculous, and shoddily put together — but those are the exact reasons why I like it. It’s extremely representative of how wrestling used to be, and an example of how many of us old-timers wish it still were.

The film does capture more than just The Sheik’s reign of terror, or Detroit and its nutty fans. It includes a feeling of how it was to wrestle during the entire territorial time period. When Vince McMahon’s WWF took over, many called it the end of the territories. But in this film, you can see another reason why some of the territories were dying out. A lot of the veterans in the film had a campy fake feeling around them that modern wrestling fans weren’t buying into. But my uncle’s charisma is felt every time he’s onscreen. It’s still not what he says, it’s what he doesn’t say.

My uncle kept it up and kept getting hated until the very end. Speaking of hate…

UNDER-ESTIMATED UNCLE

In 1988, at the age of sixty, my uncle was booked in the NWA’s Great American Bash Tour for Jim Crockett Promotions when the tour was passing through Detroit. Since The Sheik was a “hometown hero,” Jim Ross and Dusty Rhodes who were running the show offered him a pretty good deal hoping he might help draw in an area they didn’t run in much. For this card, they offered my uncle $1000, plus 50 percent of the gate as a bonus after everything they made over $50 grand.

Before this match, WCW only made around $40,000 on shows in Detroit because they were based out of the south, so they didn’t think the Sheik’s drawing bonus would even come into play. …However, they didn’t realize the drawing power of my uncle in Detroit - let alone consider the fact that this was one of the very few times he would have ever been working babyface at this time in his own state.

The Sheik wasn’t being billed as a heel. He was set to team with Dusty Rhodes against Kevin Sullivan and Dick Murdoch. So, yeah, it took him

almost 60 years, but he was finally a fan favorite in his hometown and that was a big deal!

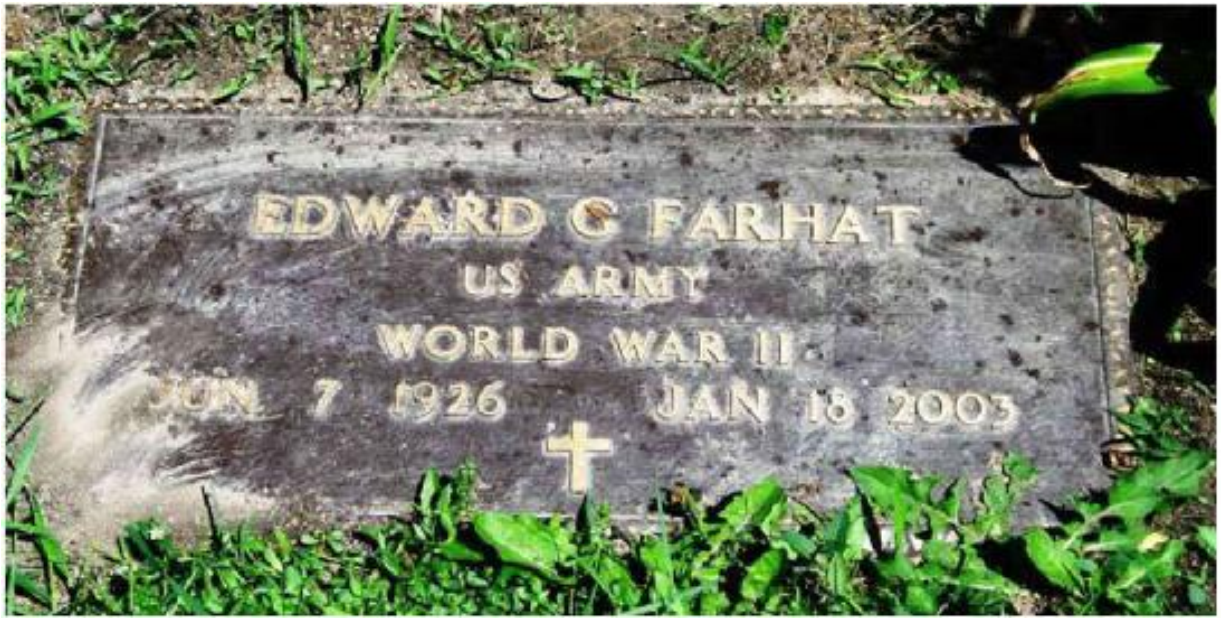
With The Sheik headlining the card, the show turned out to be a big success. It drew a $200,000 house! However, as you could guess, he never saw any of that bonus money. Either JR, or Dusty, or both of them fucked him and gave him every excuse in the book why they couldn't pay him the $75,000 they had agreed upon. Because my uncle was old school, this was all on a handshake – no contract. He got screwed with no Vaseline.

This is why I don't get along with JR to this very day.

After that, there was always heat. JR always talked down about my uncle and treated him like an asshole if he was around, and made me hate him all the more. (This is why I have slammed JR on Twitter.) Despite the fact that Jim Ross and Dusty Rhodes didn't recognize my uncle for what he was really worth, others around the world, however, did.

When The Sheik finally went down for the count and passed away in 2003, people everywhere noticed. His hard work had by then caught the eye of fans around the world. He actually got an obituary in the New York Times where they complimented him by saying, "The Sheik single-handedly escalated the violence and commercial appeal of professional wrestling in the early years of television."

It's true. In the early days of TV when Dick Van Dyke couldn't even lay in the same bed as his television wife, nobody dared pushed the envelope of what you could do on television, nobody that is except for maybe *my uncle.*


EDWARD G FARHAT
US ARMY
WORLD WAR II
JUN 7 1926
JAN 18 2003


MKPC



CHAPTER 3 – TRAINING

Soon after getting shot in the face, I learned that my shooter was arrested. He got nine months in jail. After that, he didn't learn his lesson, either. When he got out, he picked up a gun once again and held up people in an armed robbery. Nice.

The newscasters on television even went so far as to call him "The Sawed-off Bandit," because he didn't just do it once. He kept doing it, over and over again, until he was finally caught — *that fucking prick.*

When that asshole was in court again for something else after what he did to me, I went to that hearing. I looked at him on the stand, and I wanted to spear him again and finish right where we left off.

It's too bad, too. If the prosecution had stuck to their guns and pushed for an attempted murder charge for what he did to me in the first place, they would have been saving someone's life. When he got out of jail the first time, what do you think he did? You guessed it. He went and got a gun again, and killed someone else in a heist.

When he walked by me after failing parole, he had no expression on his face. As they dragged him off again to jail, he stopped and looked at me. He remembered.

"Don't worry, brother. I don't want no revenge on you, man," he said.

No revenge on me? Well, that was nice of him — as nice as a venereal disease, maybe. He had some fuckin' nerve, right? I was the one who should have been looking to get some revenge. He's lucky there were no pencils around.

You have to believe in karma though, man. In the end, he got his. He got himself killed in prison. Someone bigger and badder than he was didn't like what he was up to and shanked him in a shower with a blade made out of a toothbrush. As they say, live by the sword, die by the sword.

After surviving that bullet to the mouth, I knew it was finally time. Years and years of The Sheik turning every one of my training requests down, I picked up the phone in that hospital room and asked once more.

"So, will you train me now?"

There was a long pause before he answered. The Sheik had to have known I was tough enough to handle the rigors of whatever it took to

become a professional wrestler, now. He knew I knew that. I couldn't picture any excuse he could make to get out of at least addressing my request this time until he actually said it.

"Terry, you can't wrestle now, anymore. I hate to say it, but nobody will ever book you," he said. "You had your face shot off."

"Come on," I said, not selling his bullshit at all.

"Well, what would they call you now? *The Headless Horseman?"*

I continued to no-sell.

"Okay, heel up buddy," he said laughing at his own nonsense, "and we will start when you are better."

That was all I wanted to hear! …*Now we are talking!*

Learning from one of the very best was something I just couldn't wait to do. The moment I was healed up enough and ready to go, I knew I had to go for it. In fact, within three months after having my face almost blown off my head, I was lifting weights on a new 120-pound set and reading anything I could find on wrestling, Olympic style. I took wrestling in high school to prepare for my training, but that wasn't enough. You see, my uncle wanted me to know everything I could so I could really defend myself in the ring for real if I ever had to.

In that first year, I gained forty pounds. I ate as much protein as I could. I worked out like a demon. I took more Greco-Roman lessons. When I had finished, I took the final first step in doing what really needed to be done.

I moved up to Williamston to train with the legendary Sheik.

Now, it didn't matter to me when I moved. I wasn't leaving anyone from school behind. There were no real sort of girlfriends in high school. I think I went to a school dance just once and not for the music. I was into Ozzy, Black Sabbath, Deep Purple, and other shit girls hated. I didn't really go to that dance for a girl or anything, either. I guess I was just curious. After that, I never went to a school dance or prom, the only school function was wrestling meets. There was no pussy in high school, for me. I was just too shy.

The last "girlfriend" I had was in 10th grade, and another wouldn't come around until I was twenty.

Our original plan was I would practically live with my uncle to start my training, day and night. I pictured hours and hours of him showing me

moves, and counters, and attacks. I pictured learning everything I didn't quite understand, and I couldn't wait.

I pulled up to the huge half-mile front lawn of his place, excited for my first day. He had worked many years, and the riches of his efforts showed. His beautiful house was secluded way out in the country where nobody could bother him, and even more importantly, nobody could see us train.

His place really was a mansion with three different floors and a fancy finished-basement. He had an indoor pool, a recreation room with a billiards table and other games, and he also had an indoor gym. The training room was not big enough to hold a ring, but I figured he must have had our course all mapped out, and didn't ask.

The first night he said, "Make sure you get enough sleep because we're getting up early in the morning to start."

"Okay," I said. "What time are you thinking?"

"Get up at 6 o'clock sharp and we need to be out by seven."

So the next morning like clockwork, I woke up just as he said at six in the morning. We ate a little bit. His son, Tom, was there. My cousin looked a little bit like me and was only a few months older than I was. We had hung out some in the past, and I liked him enough. However, I knew he was not at all into wrestling at all. I wasn't sure why he was coming, but I didn't really care.

After we ate, we went out to the front of the house. I could feel my heart pounding in my chest.

Oh my God. This is great! We are finally going to train! We must be about to drive off to my uncle's ring in some kind of secret location.

Tom and I rode with my uncle way out into the woods to what I figured was a secret hideout where my uncle hide trained other great wrestlers in the past. I knew there was some mystery to wrestling, but I also knew never to ask about it. I figured he had some kind secret layer Bat-cave that I was finally going to lay eyes on. He owned a huge bit of property back there, and I had no idea where we were going. When we finally reached a clearing, I looked around. There was no Sheik-Cave, and there was no ring to be found.

Tom and my uncle got out of the truck. The Sheik walked over to the edges of the trees and started looking up and around in the air. He pointed, then shook his head. He pointed again and shook his head "no" again.

Maybe there is a wrestling treehouse or something?

I thought wrong. My uncle nodded. Then, he walked around to the tailgate and reached into the back of his truck. He slowly took out two chainsaws. I knew he was pretty much into the violent side of wrestling, but didn't see how a chainsaw fit into this part of the equation.

Before I could ask, he handed me an ax. The rest of the day, I watched them cut down trees and drag over big logs and heap them high in front of me to split. I hammered and hammered and hammered away at that wood. The pile never seemed to end.

We took tons of truckloads back to the house where he had a hungry wood-burning stove waiting to be fed for the winter. I was hungry, too. But we didn’t stop until started to get dark.

“Okay,” he said. “That’s about enough of that.”

We headed back with our last load and sat down for a late dinner. While we were eating, I still felt it was not my place to ask what was going on. The next day, I figured, would probably be time to get to some training.

Yeah, he probably just needed me to help get some chores done so he would have some extra time. That makes sense.

“All right,” he said. “You have enough to eat?”

I nodded.

“Wake up again at six. Out by seven.”

“Okay.”

The next morning, we drove out and turned left. We were headed to a different area, and I thought surely that this time, he was bringing me to his secret layer were the ring was hidden, way out in the middle of nowhere.

Again, I thought wrong.

I almost said something when my uncle took the chainsaws out of the back of the truck again, then stopped. I wanted him to train me at no costs, so I knew not to say a word. We started cutting down trees again, and I was back again to my role of breaking wood all day *and breaking my ass.*

It was always the same thing every morning like this for almost six months straight! I can’t lie. I thought about quitting a number of times.

Man, this is some real Mr. Miyagi bullshit, right here.

I come to find out, it was all part of something in professional wrestling called “weeding out the weak.” If I had just said, “fuck this,” he would've

said, “OK, you don't have what it takes.” I’m glad I was smart enough to see that if you wanted to be a wrestler, you had to deserve it.

You had to work to learn how to work.

I have no regrets at all about going through this process. This “rite of passage” really builds character.

Many years later, I would talk to a guy named “Test” in the WWF. He never had to go through a crazy working experience that was seemingly unrelated to wrestling in order to get into the ring. I was not jealous of him, however. I felt bad for dickheads like Test who were brought in this way. Coming in and having built no toughness like The Sheik gave to me is short-minded. Test only ever worked for the WWF. He walked right into the big league without the building blocks and taking the baby steps. Everything was handed to him. So when the time finally came when they had to let him go, he didn’t really know where to go.

The six months were long. After chopping all these trees down, I started to lose the vision that maybe a ring would magically appear one day — but then it did.

After one really tough day of splitting logs from sunrise to sunset, I probably only had about one or two hours of sleep, before it started all over again. I woke up that next morning like a zombie and was just going through the motions. After we ate, I headed out to the truck like usual. Before I could get in, my uncle put his hand up and blocked me.

“No, no, no,” my uncle said. “I want you to walk around the side of the house.”

I rubbed my eyes and yawned. When I walked behind the house, it hit me like a sack of bricks. My eyes opened wide. There it finally was. A wrestling ring was all set up and waiting.

It was a proud moment of accomplishment. I felt like I had passed the test.

This is great! Finally, we are going to get into the ring and do some training! I finally finished this hazing or whatever I was doing. Now, on to becoming a wrestler.

I was about to run over excitedly to the ring and get in it when my uncle interrupted by anticipation.

“See that ring over there,” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Good. Now go over there and take it down.”

I don't know if he was still trying to break me or what, but I didn't break. I walked over to the ring. I looked it over and over the best, like I was looking at one for the first time. After I finally made some sense of it, I took some tools out of a box underneath it and started to take it apart, piece by piece.

I disassembled it slowly. I removed each turnbuckle with a big wrench that I found in one of the corners. Then, I removed the beams.

I figured out how to take it apart pretty easily, and made good and sure to stack every part into nice neat piles. When I was done, I went over to my uncle who was sipping a nice iced tea on a lawn chair.

“There,” I said.

The Sheik was looking at the sports section of a newspaper and puffing on a big thick cigar. He barely looked up from his reading at my work and nodded.

“Now what?”

“Well, let's put it back together,” he said, thumbing to the next page.

I didn't understand why we would take it down and then put it right back up again, but it wasn't my place to question. I knew that if I was going to succeed, I had to do everything that he told me.

These things come down a whole lot faster than they go up.

An hour or so later, I was finally done. I was nervous to tell my uncle that I was finished, however, because of one little thing.

It looked like dog shit.

I tried. I tried my very best, but the ring looked like hell. The ropes were too loose, and the entire structure looked like it would just fall apart and collapse the moment someone stepped into it.

I went over to my uncle who was giggling through the funnies section. When he looked up at my masterpiece, he was not laughing. He shook his head and got up.

So together, my uncle and I realigned every part of the ring, piece by piece. He showed me all of the important parts of the ring and just how it needed to be tightened in order to be safe and functional.

Once the ring was completely rebuilt and looked good, I thought we were there. I started having visions of finally being able to get in the ring and do

something. That moment was something I had dreamed about ever since I saw my uncle on television as a very young child.

“Well,” my uncle said.

“Well?”

“It's time,” he said.

Yes! Finally.

“It's time, that is,” he said, walking back to his seat and picking up the paper again, “...for you to take the ring down, again.”

Oh, like what the fuck!

I was thinking that this was absolute bullshit, but I bit my lip and did what he said.

I took the whole ring down again, by myself. I stacked all the parts into nice piles again in the corner of his yard. Then walked over to his relaxation station.

I stood there until he nodded at me. He held his finger up to indicate he was finishing off a page.

“Okay. Where are we?” he said, putting the paper down in his lap. “Oh, yes. Now, I need you to put the ring together,” he said, taking a sip of his cool beverage. “This time, all by yourself.”

And he did the same thing basically all day. By the end of the day, I had taken down the ring and put it up again five or six times. It was insane.

Finally, it was too dark to move boards back and forth and to be able to see what I was actually doing. That also meant that we couldn’t see to train. I knew that today was a bust. Eventually, we went into the house and had a late dinner.

The Sheik always ate well. He never just had a sandwich or something. He always had a good square meal. My aunt Joyce was a great cook, and that meal we had was well deserved that night.

The next day after putting it up, I was in for a surprise. Then, we finally got in the ring. We started very basic at first. There was a whole lot of locking up and armbars, but I was more than satisfied. We worked hard for a number of hours that first day, then he talked some about business by night.

It was all day long, every day. At the end of the day, I had to take apart the ring again by myself, to make sure to keep it out of any potential rain.

That’s right, every day after a tough workout, it was never done until I was taking the boards and canvass off, and putting them into the barn.

ON THE ROAD

We could train forever in that ring behind The Sheik’s house, but that had no real context without seeing it used in the real world. Therefore, a few months after I started hanging out with him, my uncle had me driving around with him to shows all over the country. But I didn’t just show up for a free show. Wherever we went, The Sheik would have me there early to set up their ring and put all the chairs up around it.

I trained for nearly two years. Sometimes before a show, I would get in the ring with some of the new guys. We would work some spots and all. The funny thing is, The Sheik never smartened me up on how wrestling worked. I mean, I had developed an idea of how the secrets played a factor into what you see, but he never told me anything that would lead me to believe that something was less than what you were perceiving it to be on TV. Old school was the way.

THE FIRST TIME

Finally, the day came where The Sheik said I was ready to compete in my first match in front of a live audience. Come May 1985, Sheik told me I was ready to go.

Since I was a special case, he had me shadow him at practically all of his bookings. Some think my first match was for Big Time Wrestling, but that isn’t true. His promotion had shut down before my debut could happen. My first card with The Sheik on the road was for a small promotion called “Midwest Championship Wrestling” that ran out of Ontario, for Big Jim Lancaster. But I wasn’t set to wrestle in Canada that night. I was actually working for them in a small town outside of Sheik’s stomping grounds in Detroit.

At this time, Midwest’s roster featured guys like Ricky Johnson (The Rock's Uncle), Kevin Sullivan, and Mark Lewin. All of them had worked with Sheik and thought a great deal of him. He was a super guy as a promoter. Harley Race, for example, tells a story about how he got hurt once, and my uncle paid him for six months until he was better and ready to get in the ring again. That was just the kind of guy that he was. So when those guys heard his nephew was about to debut, they were super supportive of me. Little did I know, however, that was not the atmosphere Sheik wanted me to be in. He wanted me to learn the hard way and claw my way to the top to survive, just like everyone else. I know for a fact that The Sheik told all the guys in the locker room to look at me as being just what I was — another green guy. He wanted them to treat me just like everyone else, and not to give me a ride on the easy road. This was actually good.

On that first night, I walked into the locker room. The guys nodded at me as I finally walked over to look at the card on the wall for MY name, and not just to see who my uncle was wrestling that night. I lipped to myself the first match of the lineup, almost out loud.

The Canadian Road Warrior vs. Terry S.R.

I found my little corner of the locker room. I opened up my suitcase and got dressed.

Blue tights. Blue boots. That was it. I looked like the generic “create-a-wrestler” on a video game, with no accessories or anything to bring me to life. I was as “Plain Jane” as plain could be. I couldn’t look any more plain if I had tried.

Yes, my ring name was “Terry S.R.” The funny thing is, Sheik never told me what the letters stood for. From what I understand, if somebody asked him what it meant, he would often just say, “Mind your business,” and not reply. Therefore, I never asked either.

However, I was later told that sometimes he would say to one of the boys whom he actually liked that that the “S.R.” stood for “Sheik’s Revenge.” The implied meaning was that he was passing the torch to me and that he was unleashing a “second coming of himself” on the wrestling world. Someone else said he once told them that it stood for “Superior Race,” playing off of the whole “suicidal, homicidal, genocidal” Middle Eastern idea, but I don’t know.

What I do know was the first time I heard the ring announcer call for “Terry S.R.,” I was set to bring my A-game.

My heart pounded in my chest. I was walking the aisle, all set to take on “The Canadian Road Warrior” in a little hall in the Polish section of Hamtramck, Michigan.

The match was all in the ring. There was nothing off the ropes. No flashy stuff. No crazy finish. It was just the basics and it was all on the mat. We did everything Sheik wanted and I was pretty proud of myself for not messing anything up.

We made it to the end.

It was a 10-minute draw.

The way it worked for me wrestling as a green guy back then was, if I was facing anyone above my experience level, I more than most certainly would have lost my debut match. But in this case, the Canadian Warrior was at about the same level I was at, so the draw made sense.

After the match, all the boys ran over to me. The match was a “sellout at the curtain” because everybody wanted to see if The Sheik’s nephew had what it takes. All the guys were really nice. They came over, congratulated me on my first match, and patted me on back. Some of them even told me what they liked about the match.

After my little “party” was over, The Sheik came over to shit on me.

“You want to learn, right? You don’t need to know what you did well, you need to know what you did wrong,” he said. “So stop smiling right now and listen.”

The Sheik nit-picked the match and pointed out all the things that I did wrong, and then offered a number of options that I could have done to improve it.

“Now, if another vet tries to teach you something after a match, do you know what I want you to do?”

“What?”

“Say ‘yes, sir,’ politely — and then you don’t do it,” he said. “You understand?”

“Yes, sir,” I said.

“Now, you listen to me, nobody else. I am the one teaching you.”

After I wrestled that first match, my training started to fall into a standard format, a pattern we did every show.

Sheik would first have me pull up to the hall in his factory-built 1972 limousine so all could see. I always drove, he always rode in back. (He loved that car and considered it an extension of himself. He had it until the day he died.)

Next, I would work an early match on every card he brought me to and would give me pointers after the match. Then, I would finally referee some matches later on in the evening. He had me ref as many matches as I could because he was introducing me to every facet of the game by full immersion. It was smart. He literally was just throwing me right under the bus and trying to give me "the best seat in the house" at the same time to learn from.

There were only a few exceptions to this formula early on. The Sheik coincidentally had a quick tour over Singapore, and among my very first few matches were there, but that was a fluke. That experience was all I knew at that time. I never saw a plane after that for many years.

When I wasn't wrestling or refereeing, I was working out. Even though The Sheik wasn't all jacked up, he too was exercising all the time. He did a lot of pushups and a lot of squats. He was in really good shape, especially for someone older.

During the 1980s, I wrestled for various independent promotions in Memphis, Michigan, Ohio, Canada and Hawaii. I wrestled under all kinds of names, but never the one on my birth certificate. I was never billed as "Terry Brunk" because, obviously, that option could have caused people to confuse me with Terry Funk.

So, I have had a lot of names, but not by choice. I didn't really care about any name, but maybe I should have. More times than once after hearing the ring announcer say whatever to announce me, I thought to myself, "Aw man, why couldn't you think about something better than that?"

. . .and then there was Terry "Superfly" Snuka,

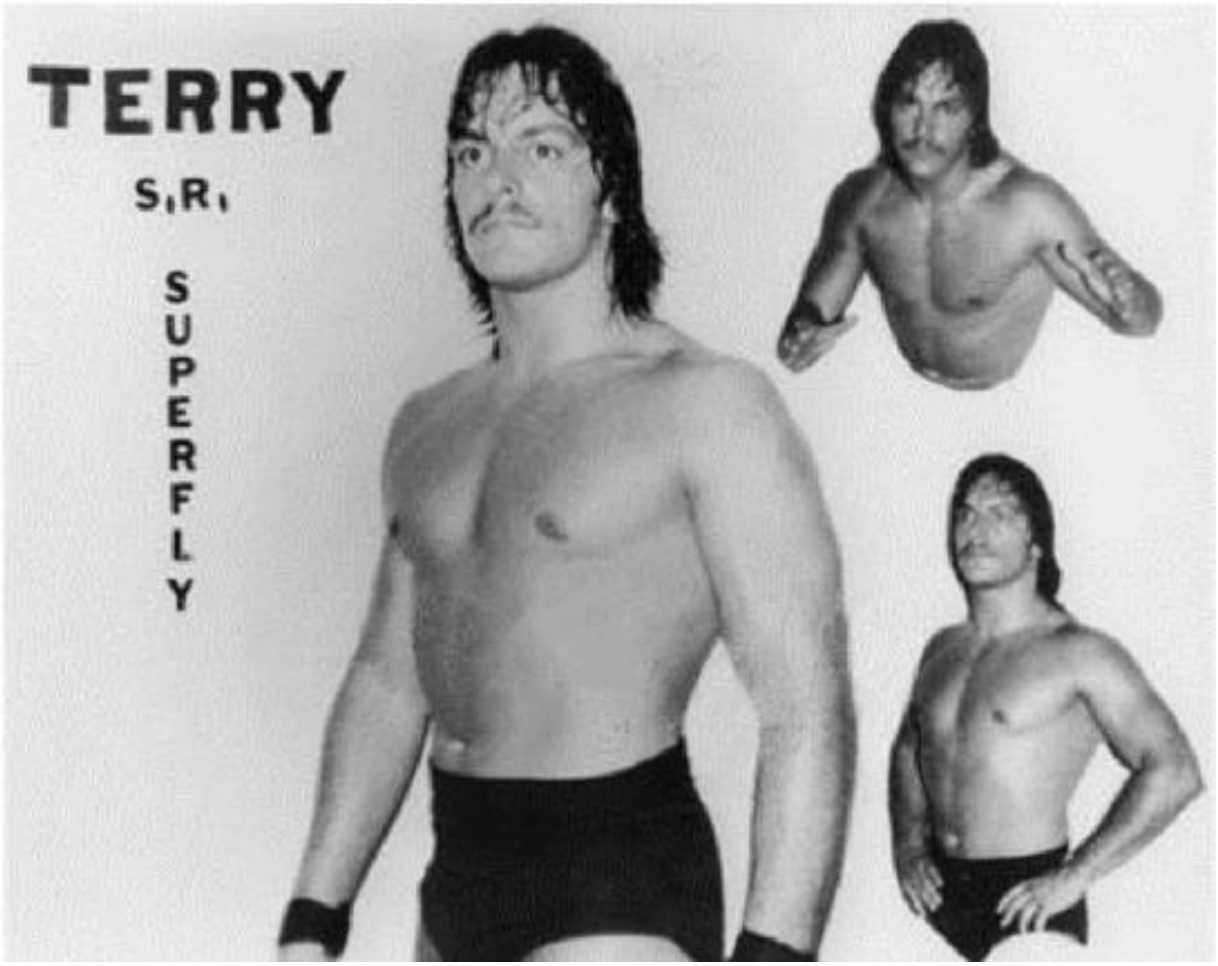
That's right. I was in the ring one time, and my own cousin "Captain Ed" was the ring announcer. The Sheik's son was on that card and had it all figured out for me.

"We have a very special guest tonight, and I'm very fortunate to be in the very same ring with the brother of Jimmy "Superfly" Snuka!"

Oh, really?

The audience cheered. Cheap heat.

“That’s right! Terry “Superfly” Snuka!
“Oh my god! You’ve gotta be kidding me!” I said under my breath.



BIG TIME CANADIAN TOURS

Most of my earliest professional exposure came from my time in Canada. One of my first major tours with multiple dates was working for a grizzled veteran named “The Bearman” Dave McKigney, a promoter out of Southern Ontario.

“The Bearman” aka “Wildman” had worked many times with my uncle and was actually operating his own promotion under the name *Big Time Wrestling,* but in Canada. Both my uncle and the Bearman were very carnie in their booking approach. They both used sideshow-like acts like female

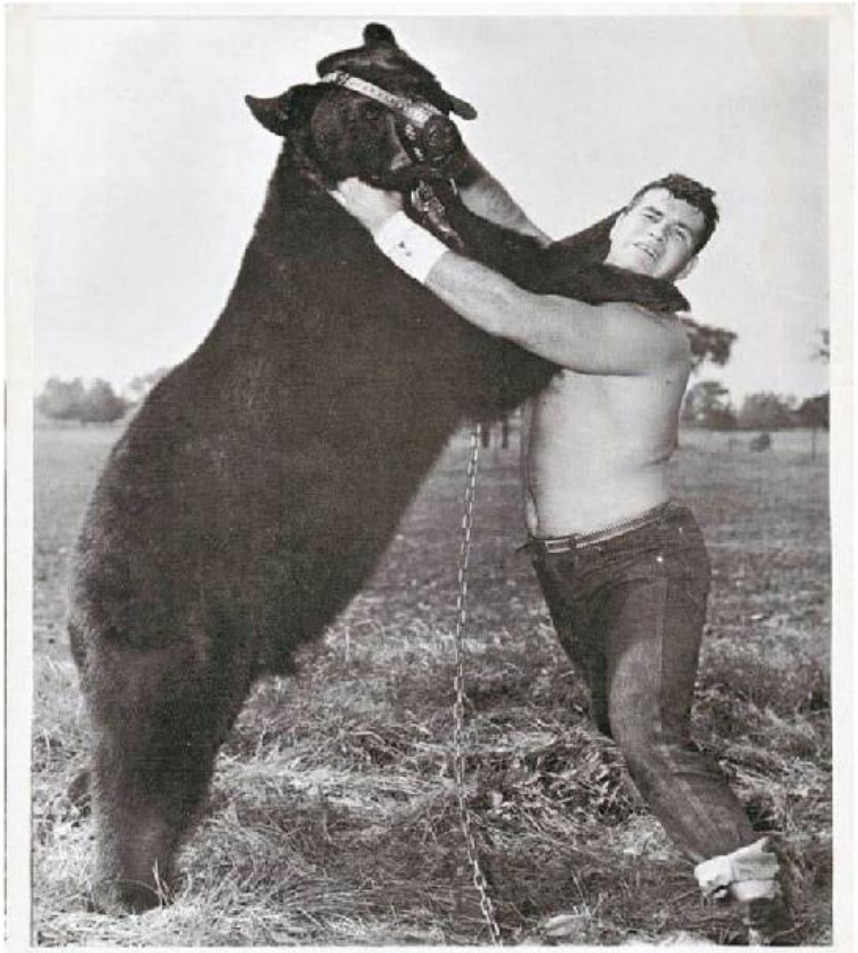
midgets and animals to sell tickets, so it made sense to share the name. My uncle wasn’t using it anyhow at the time, so he was cool with the Bearman keeping it alive. (Some today call it “Big Bear Wrestling.)

Like many old-school promoters, Dave was a former wrestler himself, probably turning to the business side of things when he got older because he knew how to work. Dave started out his own wrestling career in Toronto for Maple Leaf Wrestling, first working under the ring name "The Flying Frenchman' Jacques Dubois. After a short time, he realized that he was decent, but needed to do something to make himself look different from all the rest. Around that time, he decided to take on a student that he could train to be just what he needed to get noticed.

Eventually, Dave started training “Terrible Ted,” who stood almost seven feet tall and weighed over 600 pounds. Now, Ted wasn’t Canadian. He was from the States. Ted himself had traveled with a carnival in his early years, and, while being pretty wild and animalistic at heart, he too came from a performance background which made him a natural in the ring. The transition from a three-ring circus to the wrestling ring was therefore relatively easy. However, one of the first things Dave had to do with Ted was to have his nails removed before their first big match together.

That’s right, Terrible Ted was an American… *an American black bear, that is.*

You see, there was a Canadian carnival promotion that used to run wrestling matches as a sideshow that Dave managed to work for. When the company went bankrupt in the early 1950s selling off its assets, McKigney saw an opportunity. He bought the trained bear to teach him professional wrestling so that it would help him get noticed and draw money. Along with the gimmick, McKigney decided to grow his hair and beard out long to look like Tarzan and even started called himself “The Wildman” from time to time. Soon after this is when “The Bearman” was officially born.



"TERRIBLE TED" The Wrestling Bear

By the late 50s, the plan was in full swing. Terrible Ted and The Bear man took their show on the road and saw great success. They traveled the circuit, wrestling sometimes in front of as many as 10,000 people in the Maple Leaf Gardens of Toronto. They worked for Stampede Wrestling in Calgary across Alberta and Saskatchewan, and also occasionally for Tri-State Sports out of Idaho. The act was great, and Bearman learned a lot about the business.

Incidentally, in 1978, Bearman continued to make headlines, but not how he wanted to. Another one of his trained bears, Smokey, managed to get into his house and mauled his live-in girlfriend to death.

Come 1988, I was booked for some matches by The Bearman. He had been very friendly with my uncle over the years and decided to give me a chance on some shows that he was now promoting.

I remember on my very first tour with him, in Ontario. The tour was long and many miles between events. It seemed like we were always rushing around, sometimes with 8-hour trips between venues. Recalling those early Canadian memories now is tough for me because a lot of it is like one big blur. I do, however, remember one very grizzly match for the Bearman all too well.

By the time we pulled into town for the show, we were already late. I was dying. With very little commercialism between stops, I can honestly say that I was as hungry as a bear. Just before bell time, we finally ran into a gas station somewhere that had food and got me a cup of chili, less than an hour or so before my match.

When we pulled up to what I believe was a high school gym, I had long since devoured the spicy stew like a pig. The show had already started, and I immediately learned that I was booked on the fourth, or fifth match. With just enough time to get dressed, the bell called for me, and I jogged out to the ring.

As made my way to ringside to face Joey War Eagle, an Italian playing a Native American, I realized that something was wrong. With each step, I felt my stomach churn. My makeshift meal was going right through me.

Shit! I think I ate some bad Canadian chili.

Once that thought entered my mind – it was all about the exit. That idea was all it took. Every time I bumped, it felt like the impact was working the chili further down my intestines and closer to my bunghole. I immediately had to adjust my performance. I had to limit hitting the mat as best I could, as a workaround. I hurried through my match, clenching my buttchecks like a nerd in jail. Most of it was turning out okay, but by the time the finish came, I was worried.

Then, just as I feared, my opponent splashed me, and I made a splash in my underwear.

Fortunately for me, right after that move was the pin. 1-2-3. Unfortunately for me, right after the pin, I knew I had shit myself.

Just like a hooker walking through a crowded hotel lobby, I had to do the walk of shame out of there, no selling a big load dripping out of my pants.

When I finally made it to the entrance way, I saw a familiar face waiting for me. It was Joe, who had beat me back to the locker room, waiting. I was nervous, because I didn’t want one of the old timers to know what

happened, and I was hoping he wouldn't be around me long enough to figure it out. Still, because he was standing right there as if he wanted to talk about the match, I felt obligated to ask for feedback even though I really wanted to push by him to run the showers and clean my juicy ass.

"How was that?" I asked, hoping for a one-word answer.

"Okay," Joey War Eagle replied, an Italian playing a Native American. "It was pretty good at the start, then… then…" Then, it hit him; *the smell of freshly made bad Canadian chili shit.* He scowled and wrinkled his nose in disgust. He knew damn well what had happened and shook his head. "Ok, we can talk about it later. Now hurry. Go get cleaned up."

That match literally was *the shits.*

After a number of Canadian matches and tours, I remember the last time I was scheduled to work for the Bearman which was set to be a big run in New Foundland. My calendar was pretty open when Bearman called me to come in as a fill-in for the second or third show on a tour that had already started and filled his spot for the remaining dates. It was perfect timing.

I was getting much better in the ring, and learning from my mistakes. For this tour, I planned to be early for all of his events and not to eat a cup of gas station shit-fuel before any of my matches. I was also excited to be on his shows because I knew that Bearman was driving around a big name who already worked the start of this tour – one old school wrestling fans may be familiar with, *Adorable Adrian Adonis.*

Like any newer talent, you wanted to pick a vet's brain whenever you could, and I figured this would be a good opportunity for me to do just that.

Adrian was fired right after *WrestleMania III*. Even though he could still go in the ring, at that point his weight had gotten really out of control. By 1987, he had gained over 150 pounds and was tipping the scale at around 400! Therefore, his big money TV feud with Brutus "The Barber" Beefcake never happened. Being sent home from the WWF was a wakeup call. Adrian knew that he needed of a life change or he was risking losing his life altogether. He lost his spot in New York due to weight and knew he needed to also get back in shape. Therefore, he started training hard in his hometown of Bakersfield, California, hoping for a comeback. He started hitting the gym hard with Bobby Davis, a wrestling manager, and their hard work finally started to pay off. Adrian dropped nearly 100 pounds. He also dropped the drag gimmick in an attempt to be looked at more seriously by

promoters and started teaming up again with his ex-partner, Dick Murdoch. Adrian finally got his shit together and looked almost like he did in the early 80s when he was working “the tough guy gimmick” against Bob Backlund on TV.

Still, in need of any gig he could grab, the slimmer Adonis was booked on that same tour I was in the middle of nowhere. He had been in and out of Japan, working some AWA spots with “Cowboy” Bob Orton, where he was feuding with Tommy Rich and Greg Gagne. He also mentioned being managed by a young Paul Heyman. (Stay tuned for more on that guy, later.)

Just before I hit the road, I learned that working with Adrian Adonis just wasn’t in the cards for me in Newfoundland. It didn’t take long for the bad news to travel. You see, Adonis didn’t make it to the next show. In fact, he didn’t make it at all, and neither did The Bearman.

Apparently, Bearman was with Adrian, and a tag team called the Kelly Twins (William and Victor Arko,) who were also widely-recognized in Canada for Coors Beer, Pizza Delight, and bank commercials on TV. They were all riding together in a van through a small coastal town called Lewisporte when the driver (William) lost control behind the wheel.

Now, reports differ, but most say William Arko turned his head away from some blinding sunlight when a huge fucking moose jumped right in their path out of nowhere. He obviously swerved quickly to avoid hitting the massive animal. In doing so, the vehicle drove right off the side of a bridge and crashed down into the water a hundred feet below.

Right after it went down, the promotion’s ring truck pulled up behind them. The guys that Bearman hired to handle the ring were right there on the scene. Allegedly, some say these included Rambo Sam (a guy Bearman sometimes also used to wrestle his bears) and Robbie Funk, but I don’t know, I wasn’t there.

They moved quickly, but the sad part is, many believe it was not to help the accident victims, but rather because they saw an opportunity. You see, people knew that Bearman had ticket money in that van from the weekend shows. They also knew that Adrian had big money on him because he came straight to Canada after just finishing a big Japanese tour. Possibly thinking that everyone in the van had died, it is also possible that vultures flew out of the truck and down the big ravine to rob from the dead.

Here is where the story gets really bad. Allegedly when whoever it was got to the wreckage below, they opened the back of the van up and rifled through the wrestlers' belongings. After grabbing the ticket money from Bearman and some $20,000 from Adrian, they realized that Adrian was still alive! The story goes that the guys could have pulled Adrian from the water and possibly even saved his life. However, when they grabbed for his arm, they only took his Rolex and left him crying for help.

In the end, the unconscious driver during all this, William, would be the only survivor. His brother, Adrian, and the Bearman all died on that grim Monday morning. Accounts of all this were sketchy, and the rumors around it vary a lot due to conflicting reports of what happened. Maybe this is due to some kind of cover-up as a lot of money went missing. I don't know.

All I can say is, *only in wrestling...*



A card from the tour I was booked on. This show never happened though, due to the passing of both the promoter (Bearman) and Adrian Adonis.

WAITING FOR MY BIG BREAK

It wouldn’t be until the early 90s that I started to be called yet another name. People backstage would then come to call me “The King of the Independents.” While I was flattered to be called this, it really wasn’t a compliment, if you think about it. “King of the Independents” only means you are the king of the broke guys. In all seriousness, it took seven more years before I got my big break to go to Japan. This was probably good because I really got perfect my skills. It was almost like my training was still underway.

Before that break, I was really doing any independent show I could find, and I will admit there were not that many for an unknown. I would be lucky if I could find three or four a month. Even as “the nephew of The Sheik,” high-profile matches were scarce. It was hard to find any really good shows that I could work on in my area to keep learning.

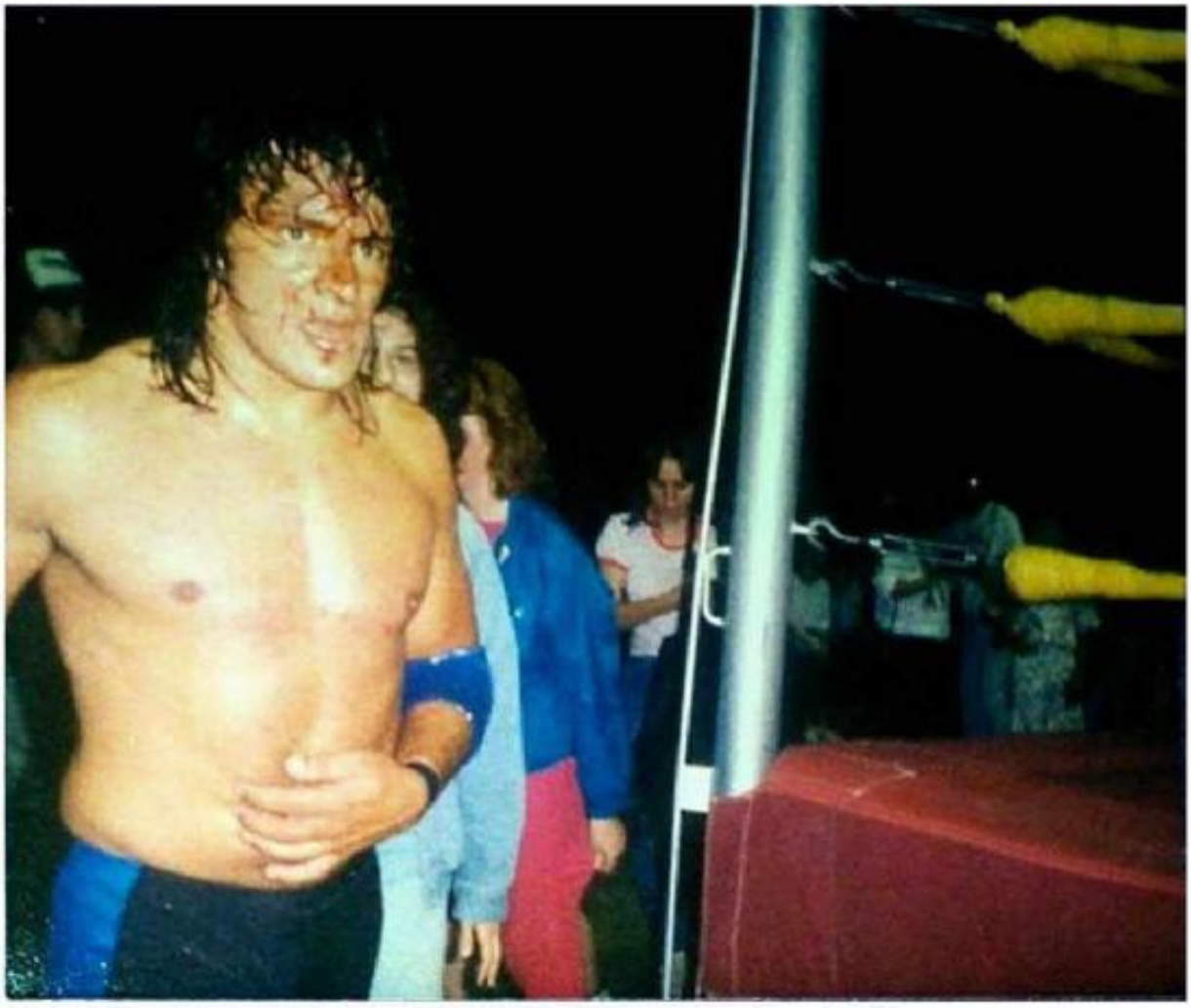
The Sheik was always a help. He would try to find me shows, but there just were none within driving range of where we lived; everything worth a shit was a twelve to fifteen-hour drive, or a plane ticket away. As a green guy, you’re just not going to go get a plane ticket from a promoter wrestling as someone named “Terry S.R., the Superfly!”

So, this time in my career was a little dry. I was broke and eating lots of tuna from the can. To work and get more experience, I was driving around like a mother fucker. As my uncle was getting older, he wasn’t working as much anymore where I could just tag along. He had lost a lot of his power in the business, and it seemed that the business was passing him by. He didn’t have the same power anymore.

See, I started wrestling right around the time that videotapes were just coming out. Not many promoters had VCRs yet. It was hard to get your name out there as a new guy, and you had no place to really go. Vince McMahon was already killing the territories before I debuted around 1985, so that left even fewer options by the time I was ready.

I just figured that eventually I would get a break and get to the top somehow, even though I didn’t even know where the top was. I didn’t care

about NWA, and I didn’t care about WWF. I just wanted to be the best and just wanted to wrestle. I also wasn’t working in my innovative style yet. I knew The Sheik wouldn’t have allowed me to do crazy stuff on his shows early on, then I just kept on working the old school style. However, whenever I was alone, or with some of my uncle’s students, I would sneak in some of the crazy stuff whenever I could.





Terry S.R. versus Chris Colt from a Big Bear Wrestling show back in 1988 (ABOVE).

Promoter Wildman Dave McKigney holding one of his promotional posters (RIGHT).

Terry S.R. stretching "Irish" Mickey Doyle (NEXT PAGE).



CHAPTER 4 – RVD

Around 1990, The Sheik had taken on four new students to train who were following us around. Sampson, Judge Dredd, Dango, and some kid who looked like the actor from *Bloodsport*. Yes, very good. You are right, he was Rob Van Dam, my future partner in crime.

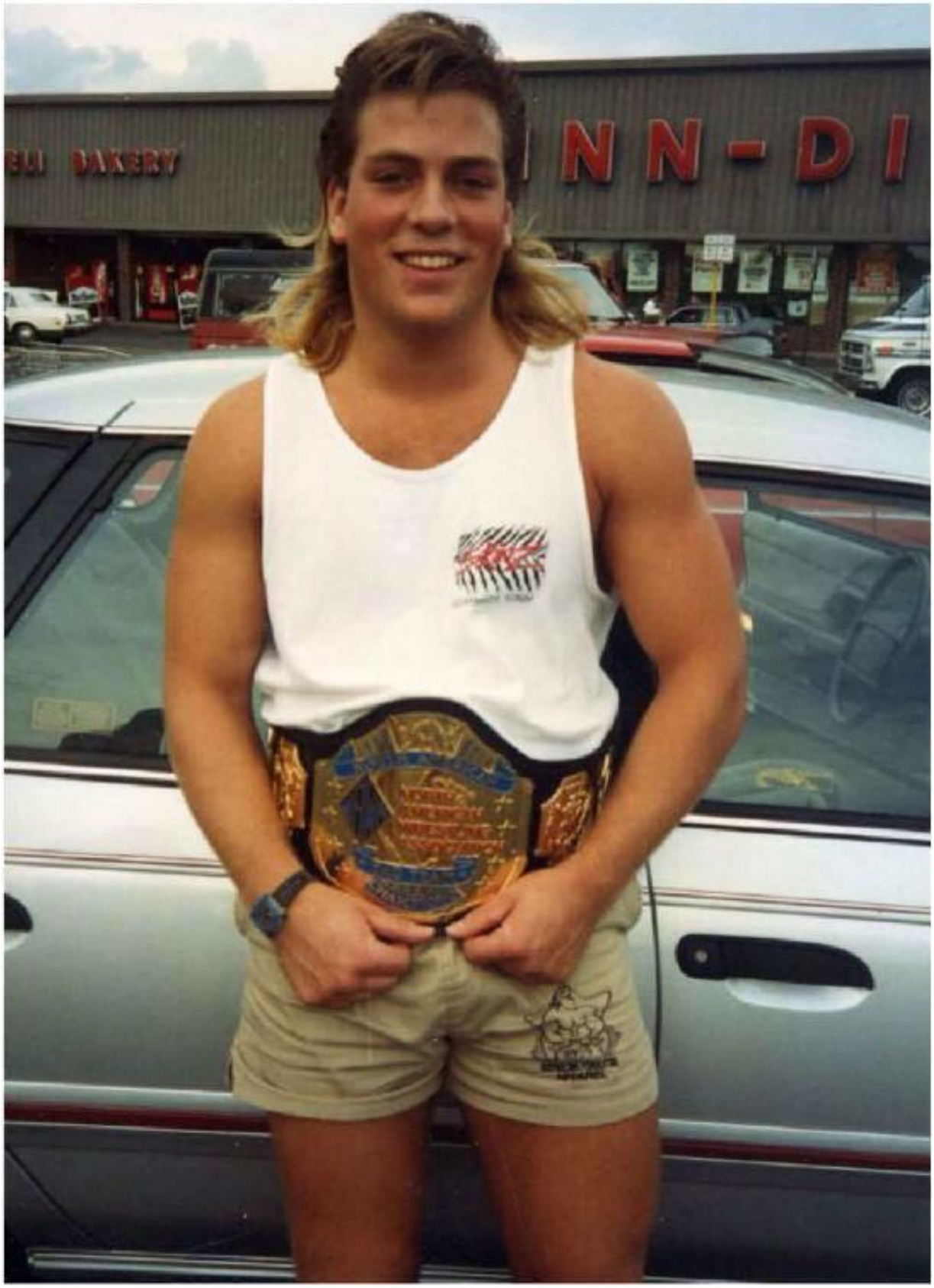
Rob Szatkowski's first in-ring experience was in 1987 as a fan, being paid the big bucks to kiss Ted DiBiase's feet. After that, he got bit by the bug and knew he needed more.



Still a senior in high school, Rob started doing a lot of research, but not for English class. He wanted to figure out how to become a wrestler. Back then, there was no internet. After some digging, he found an ad in a wrestling magazine where they promised to send you a list of the very best secret professional wrestling schools in the land. He mailed out his $5 and waited. Finally, two weeks later, he got the letter back. He scanned down the directory and found the closest ones to him. First, he gave Larry Sharpe at The Monster Factory a call. Next, he called Killer Kowalski's school and it was a little cheaper so he decided that was the one to go with. (Cheap bastard.)

In December of 1989, Rob was all set to go to Kowalski's school. He was saving money from working at a grocery store when, one day, some big guy came through his line. As he was loading his bag, Rob mentioned something like, "I wish I was as big as you, I want to get into wrestling," and it just so happened that the customer knew a guy much closer than Boston. The Sheik was right in Michigan, only forty-five minutes from his parent's house.

Rob was amazed and couldn't understand it. The Sheik's school was not even on his $5 list!


BAKERY
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NEW MOVES & EATING DIRT

Rob contacted my Aunt Joyce and setup a tryout session. Now, around the same time, there were others. A handful of other guys had also randomly written letters to my uncle, sending their pictures and asking to be trained. Out of all the applicants for the new upcoming class, the only ones who really looked the part of a wrestler were Sampson, and Dredd. Sheik agreed to let them and a few hopefuls all come on the same day to give the possibility of a new class a whirl.

The final slot was filled by Dango, a big 400-pound Vietnamese kid. Rob got permission to bring him along to that tryout class because they both had the same "dreams and goals." On top of that, Rob told the Sheik that they both did tough man and martial arts competitions together, so he seemed like a possible good fit.

Finally, the first day of class came. Sheik had some other potentials there, as well, all standing in the ring with me waiting in his backyard. When Sheik finally came out of the house, he got in the ring and eyeballed everyone. He didn't just have them come to take their money. He truly respected the business and planned to do things the right way.

First, my uncle ran a few drills, checking to see who had any real potential. A handful of goofy-looking fuckers were eliminated almost right away. Then, Sheik did some strength and cardio tests, and even more Herbs were dismissed. In the end, Sampson, Dredd, Dango, and Rob were the only ones who made the cut.

Sheik focused a lot on Rob that first day. He was pushing him around a bit into the ropes and all to see how he could move, checking his balance and coordination. He had me get in the ring and push him around a little too. It wasn't like mean stuff, it was more like to see how well he could stay on his feet. Rob kept right up. He was landing on his feet like a cat.

"So, do you have any kind of training or anything you do already?" my uncle asked him.

"Well, I can do some flips and kicks. I figure that might be good in the ring."

"Okay, can you show me?" my uncle asked Rob.

Rob unleashed with some pretty impressive kickboxing-style kicks on a crash dummy we had in the corner of the ring. The kicks were fast and

pretty high.

“What else do you got?” he asked.

Rob did some splits and showed some good flexibility.

The Sheik looked at me and I nodded. The kicks and splits seemed to show some signs of athleticism.

“What else?” he said.

Rob did a backflip, and then a few more acrobatic-like flips.

The Sheik looked at me again, and I nodded again.

“Okay, come back next week and bring me some money,” he said.

Rob’s eyes lit up. “Thank you so much, sir,” he said, super appreciative. “I won’t let you down.”

Aunt Joyce had the four new guys sign some kind of contract. It was something like $2,000 to take the class, allowing them to make pretty reasonable payments along the way, although I don’t know if any of them actually ever paid off the full amount. That didn’t seem to matter all that much to my uncle, as long as they were trying. The other part of the contract I think was a little more important. The Sheik kind of agented for them for a period of time. This that meant if anyone wanted to book them, they had to go through The Sheik and he would get some kind of cut.

The new elite class of four came out to Michigan. I think they got some kind of crappy apartment in the city. Once it was settled, I started training with them in Uncle’s backyard. Again, we were way out on a farm, in the middle of nowhere where no one could see. There were no real streets, so just like before, he was okay training out in the open. The only difference this time was, he was nice to them. There was no chopping trees for months on end. There was no splitting wood in their curriculum.

Now that’s not to say that my hazing wasn’t over, however, even while I was in the ring practically training the new guys myself, sometimes. Every so often, I would have to go off and mow the grass for hours, while the new guys were just drilling the basics in the ring.

Working with them was great, though. I was pulling for all four to succeed. I remember hoping they would all be good, but I was still learning myself.

I did most of the hands-on stuff in the ring, as The Sheik was still recovering from his hip operation. I would shout some directions from a lawn chair from time to time, or sometimes left notes for me.

Right away, I started in on the traditional wrestling training practice of “weeding out the weak.” Following the instructions of my uncle, I stretched the guys a little. I blew them up. I made them sweat bullets under the hot sun for hours.

We worked on amateur wrestling moves quite a bit. All the while, I was showing them how to work without ever smartening them up. You did this back then, just in case someone didn’t make it through the training, which was nine times out of ten.

At the end of the day, we would all put the ring away into the garage. It was an odd ring the way he had it cut in half so it could fit in storage, but it worked.

Teaching that class taught me a very valuable lesson: I learned then that not everyone had a passion for wrestling like I did. Not everyone was a student of the game like I was from day one. Before going in, I didn’t know that some guys didn’t have the same heart as I did. Some guys just wanted money.

“You have to learn to eat dirt,” The Sheik would say, looking at one of the new guys falling short and stinking up the ring.

My uncle treated me like shit to make me tough. When I was training, I had to cut grass between my practice matches. However, when RVD came in, Sheik couldn’t really have him do that so he didn’t have to, and neither did Dango (Rob’s best friend) or Judge Dredd. The difference with the other guys was they didn’t have the same attitude or work ethic that Rob and I did. Whatever it took, we did it. While they would say, “I’m not throwing in extra gas money mileage,” we always pulled up the slack to make it happen. This is probably why we took off and they didn’t, and also the difference of why other guys fell off.

I wanted to make it in wrestling, but I wasn’t in it for the money. At this point early on, if I got to wrestle, that was almost payment in itself.

Later on down the road, we would eventually see that Samson, Dango, and Dredd, didn’t really have the complete desire to be a contender. Sure, they would do some spot shows here and there eventually, but they didn’t have what it took to want to climb their way to the top. They didn’t have the mindset that nothing was going to be handed to you, and you were going to have to work hard for something you wanted. They didn’t want to eat dirt.

And then there was Rob... Rob loved dirt.

He would eat piles of it.

Rob would come all the time to train. He had a huge work ethic. He would train hard all day, and think about things to do when he wasn't there. It showed.

Now, Sheik was old school. He was all about the basics. He protected the business in every aspect. You could graduate through the entire school and have never have been smartened up by him by the way he taught everything. At no point did he say or indicate to any of the students that wrestling had secrets. You could have passed with flying colors and never have known the wiser. Basics were everything.

"What are you, afraid you are going to hurt him? You look like a couple of cunts out there" he would yell during practice. "Grab him!"

Sheik would get riled up, then get in the ring to fire us up. He would beat the shit out of the students and really focus on Rob. Sometimes, he was exceptionally rough on Rob because he wanted him to succeed. He would scare and intimidate Rob. He would even stretch Rob in a crazy submission and bite his nose, sometimes. And all the while, he would never once do anything that would smarten us up.

Sheik really only wanted to see reversals and go-arounds. He wanted to see you jump down on a guy and go to town on him. He wanted to see you try to win no matter what. You are trying to win, end of discussion. If you didn't do this, then you didn't know what the hell you were doing in the ring.

But Rob and I were creative and complemented each other pretty well off of our passion to be innovative. We would wait for The Sheik to head on into the house to get some iced tea or something. Whenever it was just us out there, we knew it was time to shift gears. The basics would go out the window and with no Sheik there, we were there to practice weird moves. The weirder the better: flips, bouncing off ropes, spinning around, anything that looked different. That shift in class was our unspoken rule. It is funny, though. The moment The Sheik would return, we would go right back to basics.

This is probably why Rob would often come over when there was no class scheduled. When it was just me and Rob Van Dam, sometimes, Sheik was either out on the road, or nowhere to be found. That is when we would really get crazy. We didn't do anything you would see in the ring anywhere.

We would invent new moves. We would come flying off the ropes. We would add acrobatics. He was just as athletic as I was, and also a student of the game. Because of this, I finally had someone to work with that had the same mindset. We really hit it off.

Now, I wasn't all that acrobatic at this point. Rob would show me how to do some flips, and I would show him positioning and maybe some flashy arm drags. Rob was a natural and already a bit of a show-off, which for wrestling would be good.

Every summer, I guess, Rob would go to some summer camp and learned how to do his flips. As a young kid, he was already competitive and extreme. When he would go to the swimming pool, he would see the kids bouncing around on the diving board. If there was a kid there who could do a full flip, Rob would come next and work on a double flip. Or if he saw a kid on the diving board do a backflip, Rob would practice until he could do a backflip and a half. That's is just how he was. Then if someone else could come along and match his backflip and a half, that wouldn't fly.

Before we would work out, Rob would stretch forever — much longer than anyone else I had ever seen. Because of this, Rob was like, super stretchy, like Gumby. Because of his flexibility, you never could really hurt him. He would do all these crazy stretches so that his body was ready for anything. That really helped him excel. One time, I remember him coming down hard off of the top rope and landing on his head. But because he had stretched out so well before, nothing ever broke. He just kind of bounced.

I saw something in Rob. I knew he knew that he had to "eat dirt" in order to eat caviar, someday.

MEMPHIS

"Pack your bags," Sheik said hanging up the phone. "Let's go."

"Where are we going?"

"Memphis," he said like it was no big deal.

I learned already learned a lot in Memphis, working there some before this. But this time, my uncle got all of our whole little entourage booked. I think maybe at this time, Sheik had some matches with Lawler or Mantell. I

was working some of the mid-card guys, and Rob was having his first match with Dango.

Sheik had taught us that there was no bullshit in the locker room. You were no longer a fan. You didn't mark out. You didn't ask for pictures with guys. You were one of the boys, and that was it. You were pretty much to yourself but were friendly when you introduced yourself, and also shook everyone's hand when you left.

In the ring, I always thought the Memphis style was alright, but it wasn't really me. I always had tried to add some more effort to it to get noticed and would get shot down. I wanted to make the match a little faster and a little rougher, but that wasn't how it worked there. Sometimes, they would tell me I was working "too hard," and they always said that I needed to "slow things down." Back then, I honestly had no clue what they meant. Looking back, I do understand what they were trying to say now, but honestly, I don't believe in that mentality. The cartoony Memphis style wasn't me.

The guys in Memphis would say to save the big moves for the big shows, but I never listened. The Sheik wasn't with me on every show at this point, as I was off getting some of my own bookings here and there, but I always did what he had taught me. He told me to treat every show like it is a big show as to that person in attendance, because to the many fans who couldn't afford to go to every show, "it was a big show to them."



SABU THE ELEPHANT BOY

Once it was revealed in wrestling magazines that “Terry S.R.” or sometimes “Terry Essar” was, in fact, The Sheik's nephew, he decided that I should play off his gimmick a little to make some money. That is when my name change occurred.

My new name was to be “Sabu The Elephant Boy.”

I didn’t know what this meant at first. I didn’t know if he had envisioned a Dumbo-like WWF cartoony gimmick. I didn’t know if I was going to have some kind of debilitating disease link the hunch-backed Elephant Man. I didn’t know what to expect.

“So, what do I do?” I asked.

The Sheik pulled out an Indian head wrap from a bag and handed it to me. Then he proceeded to spin it around my skull.

“Well, you're going to be a young wrestler from India,” he said, trying to offer some clarification.

“Okay,” I said. “But why am I Indian?”

“Because you're going to be a heel, now,” he said.

“Okay, but why does being from India make me a heel?”

“Because I hate Indians.”

And that was that.

The “Sabu” part of my new name had special meaning to my uncle. There was a movie called *The Elephant Boy* from way back in 1937 that Sheik really loved as a kid. It was a British adventure film starring a young actor named only Sabu in his film debut. The film was shot in Mysore, India, and was based on a story called “Toomai of the Elephants” in Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. I also came to find out that the term “elephant boy” in India was almost like our term “cowboy” over here. It was someone who managed a herd and all, only tending to a different indigenous beast.

The Sheik always loved that movie. It left a real impression on him, so much so that he wanted to name his second son “Sabu,” after the British film based on *The Jungle Book*. My Aunt Joyce was not hearing any of that noise, however. She was more conservative. In the end, she finally gave in a little bit for his passion and let him use the name, sort of, on a different member of the family.

I don’t mean me, though. I wasn’t the first Sabu. There was one before me.

You see, The Sheik named his dog Sabu.

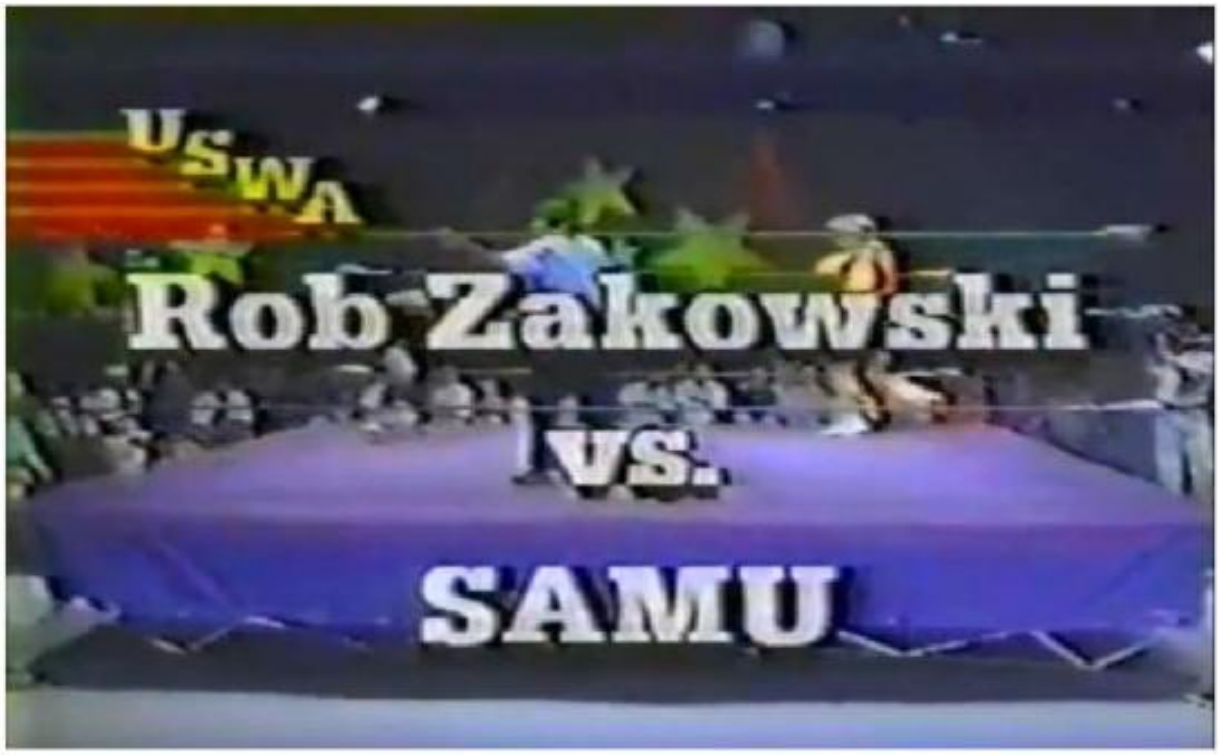
He was the original one-ton canine shitting machine. He was a big white bastard of a German shepherd that could drop about a twenty-pound pile of poo on any given morning. I know all too well because I myself cleaned many of his steaming mounds during my training days on his farm.

Who knew I would eventually inherit the same name as a dog?

I tried the new Sabu gimmick out during a Memphis tour from June to August of ‘91. I wasn’t a big fan of comedy spots, so the new gimmick

wasn’t a good fit there. I wanted it to be a feared gimmick like The Sheik’s gimmick was, but everyone kept pushing for me to do silly stereotypical nonsense with the new character.

One of my most notable runs at this time under the new name was in a series of matches against Jeff Jarrett. USWA kept billing me though as “Samu,” on television, for what reason? I do not know. Maybe they just got the name wrong, or maybe Jerry Lawler was out chasing little puppies and not paying attention.



So “Samu the Mystery Man” chased Jeff around who often teamed with Robert Fuller against me with Judge Dredd. Samu also had a few matches with Danny Davis.

I don't have any real heat with Bill Dundee or Jerry Lawler, but they would motherfuck and rib the hell out of anyone new. They would ask them for advice to embarrass them in front of everyone in the locker room. They would ask for help in a town, but then send us off in the wrong direction and make us super late for a show - then point out to everyone that we were late when we finally showed up. They really sucked. At one point, between the horrible payoffs and the limited wrestling style in that territory, I was

almost ready to quit. My uncle convinced me to stick with the booking, as it would have looked bad to pull out. Also, my friends were there and I made a new friend, Chris Candido, who helped. They made Memphis a little better to deal with, so I managed to see things through until the end of the tour.

Sheik had really bad hips, both of them, from years and years of wrestling hard. While wrestling a bunch of blah-blah matches in Memphis as a brand new nobody, The Sheik and I had developed a ritual. Before every show, I had to actually help him put boots on. This wasn't even a respect thing, though I had all the respect in the world for him. His hips were actually so bad that he couldn't reach his feet without writhing in pain. The Sheik finally went against his work ethic and took some months off away from the business to get that much-needed hip surgery.

It turns out that was a wise investment for him, and money well spent. Once he had surgery, he was seemingly all better. Just like that, the operation made him a new man again and, so much so, that he never really retired after that. He worked as much as possible.

Finally, Japan called.

The timing of the Japanese booking was perfect.

My first FMW tour was set. I was going to be making $2,500 a week. I will admit, Onita really only booked me because he wanted Sheik and I was part of the deal. To be honest, I'm sure Onita had absolutely no clue who I was.

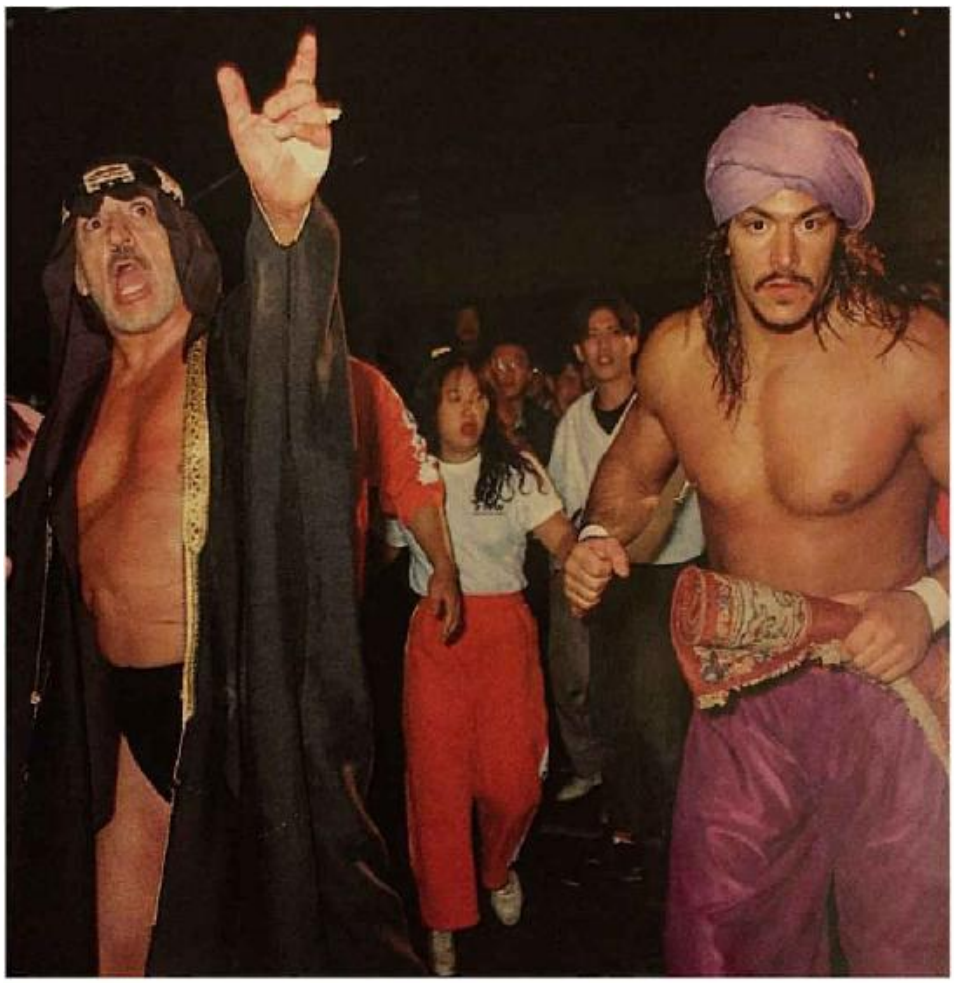
After we got that call from Onita in Frontier Martial-Arts, we were both ready to go off to compete for the FMW World Brass Knuckle Tag Team Championship.





試合後も客席の通に割って入って、暴れ続けたシーク達　シークにとっては10年ぶりの後楽園登場だ　待ちに待った東京のファンは、大興奮！

▼公式リーグ戦（45分一本勝負）
ザ・シーク
○サブラー（10分11秒 ラクダ固め）
（4点）
（0点）





CHAPTER 5 – FMW

Onita wanted everything to look as real as possible imitating something that was hot in the fighting arts market. Right about this time in 1991, the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) was just taking off. Back then, it really wasn't "Mixed Martial Arts" yet. What they did was pit one karate guy against a boxer or a judo fighter against a kickboxer. The mixing idea was more about pitting one discipline of combat against another. Onita liked this idea very much and decided to bring his own version of it to Japan.

So what Onita decided to do was to book professional wrestlers in matches against some real fighters that he booked *and not tell them it was a work.*

On the fifteen-hour flight over to Japan, The Sheik told me he wanted me to wrestle differently in Japan, "to enhance the Sabu character." He didn't want me to look generic and to be forgotten. After six years of growing my hair long to get that tougher "wrestler look" going, I knew I had a decent look, but he thought that changing my wrestling style along with my new look would really serve me well.

"Who do you want me to wrestle like?"

"Sabu."

"Sabu?"

I want you to start to wrestle like how you would in the backyard when you thought I wasn't watching," he said.

My heart dropped.

"You saw that stuff?" I asked, embarrassed that my front had been blown. I pictured The Sheik maybe watching from the kitchen window, maybe hiding behind the curtain shaking his head, just as I did my first triple jump moonsault landing on RVD's head.

He said nothing and grinned a little.

"The shit with Rob and all? You saw us practicing and never said anything?"

He nodded.

"You knew all the time?"

"Yes."

I couldn't believe it. I was a little uneasy at the thought of what he must have been thinking at the time, but I was also relieved. I was finally being

liberated to do what I wanted to do!

“Well, are you sure?”

“I’m sure,” he said. “And hunch over more. Don’t worry about making the fans confused, or happy, or sad. Just do those damn crazy moves I saw you doing, and I think everything will turn out just fine.”

Now, I had no idea what exactly he had seen. We had done some pretty fucked up shit whenever he wasn’t around. With absolutely no idea which moves he was talking about, because we had done so many, I decided I might need to clarify. “Which ones?”

“Any of them. Do any of them you want,” he said. “Do all of them.”

ARRIVAL TO JAPAN

Now, I was never able to do whatever I wanted in the ring America. Working the Memphis style was the exact opposite of what started running through my head on the flight to Japan. So when I was told that I could do all the crazy stuff I did when I knew Sheik wasn’t watching, I felt like a huge weight had been lifted off of my shoulders.

Sabu is about to born.

I remember thinking Japan was going to be ideal for me. In Japan, their standards were different. Popular wrestlers like Hulk Hogan were held in low regard by the fans because they didn’t have a whole lot of wrestling skills. The entertainment factor was smaller, and the Japanese wrestling fan was all about the action in the ring. In Japan, famous cruiserweights like Jushin Liger and The Great Muta aka Keiji Muto were already legends because of the way they wrestled.

When we first got off of the plane, we headed to the street to find something to eat. Though I have been going over to Japan for almost thirty years and I am really used to it now, my initial impressions of Japan were shocking at first, I have to admit.

I went over to a stand on the side of the street. There I watched someone who looked like a Japanese Charlie Chaplin put a big pink scoop onto a cone and hand it to a little old woman.

Mmm. Ice cream. I could go for some of that right now.

When I got a closer look, that pink scoop was not strawberry. I was actually not ice cream at all. I watched in horror to see that the little lady was eating a healthy serving of a raw hamburger served in a waffle-like cone like it was ice cream.

Then, just when I thought I had seen it all, her friend reached over the counter and held a ball of raw ground meat in her hand. She poked her thumb deep into it, then cracked an egg over the hole. The yellow goo filled the opening. She smiled, packed the meat back into a ball shape, made an apple out of it, and ate it.

I pointed out the raw burger ball with the creamy egg filling to The Sheik. He looked, no sold it and then continued walking like nothing out of the ordinary had happened. All the while, I turned back for one last dose and saw that yoke was dripping down her chin.

Finally, we met up with Atsushi Onita, the head honcho of FMW, and the second in command, Tarzan Goto. Onita was assigned to my uncle as a "young boy" for Abdullah the Butcher in All Japan and used to carry Sheik's bag. They went way back.

For that first tour, we were waiting for the bus with a bunch of guys, but nobody knew who we were. Because Onita was bringing in different disciplines of fighting, there were a lot of shoot guys there who knew nothing about wrestling, and none of them trained.

My Uncle Ed went in to use a public Japanese bathroom. For those of you who don't know, a lot of the Japanese toilets are not raised bowls that you can sit on, they are *flush to the ground*, pardon the pun. (That was bad even for me.)

The Sheik went right in like an old pro. He squatted over one of those holes in the ground and took a nice post-

flight dump. When he came back out of the restroom, he leaned up against a wall on the street and looked down.

"Shit. I think got some shit on my boot," he said in front of the boys.

Everyone looked down.

"Is that shit on my boot," he asked me.

"Yeah, I think that's shit," I said.

"Well," he said. "Wipe it off."

I went back into the bathroom and got a paper towel. When I came back, I picked the turd off of his boot and cleaned the silky splatter off to the best

of my ability.

All the boys popped. They thought that was the funniest thing ever. They thought I was like an American “young boy,” who would do whatever his mentor asked.

THE YOUNG BOYS

“Young boys” are wrestling trainees and ring crew. As part of paying their dues, they do pretty much every shitty job you can imagine. They clean the ring mat, tape and maintain the ropes, clean the established wrestlers’ ring gear, and they basically do whatever the stars tell them to. They would often have to do horrible, silly things by their mentors who, in a sense, were doing the whole traditional “weeding out” thing to see if they could hang.

Dynamite Kid used to tell a pretty nasty story of a young boy having to untie his mentor’s boots. When the young boy didn't do it fast enough, he took a stiff knee to the face, breaking his nose. Then his mentor shoved him to the floor and walked away.

Onita was a big advocate of having young boys cater to his every whim. While he didn’t necessarily physically abuse them, it wasn’t an unusual sight to see a whole group pampering him before a show. If you didn’t know any better, you would think he was a prince. He would sit down like royalty in a chair and his boys would just flock to him. One would massage his right foot, while another massaged his left. Another would rub his shoulders, while yet another trimmed his nails. Then, another young boy would hold an ashtray under his cigarette, and even tap the ash off the cigarette for him.

The funniest thing about everyone thinking that I was just another young boy would come later on my very first night of my first Japanese. When I finally debuted as an unhindered Sabu with all my crazy moves, nobody was laughing. I was flipping around and doing all kinds of things that nobody ever saw before. They couldn’t believe it.

My first FMW match was on November 20, 1991, at the Osaka Prefectural Gym. It was me and The Sheik versus Horace Hogan and Mark

Starr.

The Sheik hadn't wrestled in Japan since 1981, but he was still over. Everyone still knew him. The Japanese fans that night clearly knew of his rule-breaking antics like the pencils and throwing fire in his matches.

Still coming off of his surgery, my uncle couldn't move around that well, so I had to save the day. Because it was a tag match, that is where I came in. It was my responsibility to try to hide his weaknesses. It worked. I did all the heavy lifting, and we won with The Sheik getting the pinfall over Starr in just 72 seconds.

Even more importantly, I was able to show a completely different kind of hardcore crazy wrestling style than the FMW fans were accustomed to seeing from Onita, the guy who ushered that style into the country in the first place. Using a bunch of wild acrobatic moves that Rob and I had come up with, nobody had ever really seen that kind of offense from any professional wrestler before inside of a wrestling ring.

"Oh my god, did you see that?" Mike Awesome asked another guy. "The poop kid is incredible!"

News in the locker room traveled quickly. They all learned I was a bit of a daredevil, at heart, and couldn't believe what they were seeing. Just like Onita did, I was throwing in all kinds of high-flying, high-risk maneuvers to make sure the fans got their money worth. But I was doing it my way and much different than anyone had ever seen.

FMW had started this particular tour in October 1991. A guy by the name of Masashi Honda was being pushed into main event matches under his new ring name "Mr. Gannosuke" based off of a name Tarzan Goto came up with. Mr. Gannosuke ended up suffering an injury just as I showed up and was going to have to miss the rest of 1991. As they say, "One man's garbage can be another man's treasure."

Gannosuke's injury left a few holes in some cards, and Tarzan Goto finally had an idea on how to fill it. He was going to fill some of the spots with a mysterious *gaijin* talent that they didn't know they had. This was great for me because it allowed me to step away from the tag team matches I had been booked for to accept a fill-in opportunity for some really great featured singles bouts.

When I came back to the locker room, I was greeted with many waves of a vast sea of compliments. So that was the start of my first five-week tour

for Onita. I immediately felt confident right that I was going to fit in very well in their scene with my crazy cruiserweight skills.

EIJI EZAKI

Also that first night at the Osaka Prefectural Gym, a guy named Ezaki came up to my uncle several times in the locker room to offer whatever services he may need. My uncle politely refused, because you could easily see he was somewhat star struck.

Ezaki teamed up that night with Yukihide Ueno as they would lose to the Korean martial arts team of Chong Summusu and Kim Shunki. Like my uncle and I, they too were participating in the World's Strongest Team Team Tournament, where I made my Japanese debut.

Come to find out, Tarzan had been grooming both Ezaki and the guy I was soon to replace, Masashi Honda (aka Mr. Gannosuke) for bigger and better things in FMW than just being young boys. Only a few months before my first match in Japan, on September 23, 1991, at Kawasaki Stadium, Ezaki and Honda just had the biggest match of their careers against each one another.

Before that match, Honda was complaining about stomach problems. Ezaki said he thought it was just jitters, but it turned out it was much more than that. Honda learned that his appendix was a mess and that it needed to have it removed right away. Honda knew he was going to be out of commission soon, but he didn’t also want to mess things up that night for his friend Ezaki too. Instead, he chose to do whatever he had to do to make that match still happen for him, a guy he broke into the business with. Honda pilled-up to the max. He took as many drugs as it took to kill the pain just long enough to get through the match. It worked.

A few nights after my debut, the tour continued to move onward to Tsuyama. There, where Eiji Ezaki probably would have faced Honda, the card was subject to change and it did. Ezaki had his first ever singles match with me. In what was booked as being an easy victory over the young Ezaki in just over three minutes, he came up to me after the match and thanked me over and over like I was a legend.

Ezaki was a very grateful guy. I guess at the time, he was still a young boy and not only did he idolize The Sheik, but that worship rubbed off onto me. He ran to open doors for us and insisted on carrying our bags. He was a super nice guy and while he loved us, it also seemed like he feared us at the same time.

Ezaki was what he was in my book, but he wasn't really even on my uncle's radar. Eventually, however, he went out of his way to help The Sheik in any way that he could. He was just like, always right there, and he really was a help, sometimes. Because of this, he would earn the respect of my uncle and would eventually be considered The Sheik's favorite young boy. Ezaki was eventually allowed to call him "Papa Sheik".

Ezaki went on to become *Hayabusa*.

SPONSORS

Right at the start of my first trip to Japan, I found out quickly that the good food was near the bigger cities. One night, my uncle pointed out one of his regular "sponsors," waiting for us in the locker room.

"See that guy over there?" he asked.

"Yeah," I said as I looked over. There was a stout little guy wearing a *Staying Alive* suit, complete with a gold chain out over the collar. He had two skinny thugs with him wearing short sleeves, sporting some ridiculous tattoos.

"Do you know what he is?" my uncle asked.

"The mafia?"

"Well, let's call him a sponsor," he replied, not saying "no."

Turns out he was a boss. After a number of nights in the boonies without a lot of dinner options, this guy was taking us out for some really good food and about to treat us like royalty.

"Sponsors" were big wrestling fans with big money, and this particular one was a huge fan of The Sheik. He had taken him out before a number of times and was excited to finally meet up with my uncle again after a long absence. Not only did he take us out for some of the best Kobe beef that

money could buy and some really badass Korean BBQ, but he even had presents!

After we ate our fill over a thousand-dollar bill, the sponsor took out a cloth bag from the inside pocket of his ghetto jacket. He opened it up and spilled it out into his hand. Then, he presented my uncle with a big chunky gold ring that would even make Liberace drool.

“That is not all,” he said. Then, the sponsor pulled out a second bag and poured it out just like the first. In his palm was a massive gold necklace, not unlike the pimpin’ one he had been sporting around his own neck.

The only difference was, it was even bigger.

Knowing that the yakuza were very particular, and not knowing the particular etiquette with this type of gifting ceremony, I watched my uncle and took his lead.

My uncle nodded and said, “Domo arigatou.” He then sized up the ring and tried it on a few fingers, until he found the only one it really fit on: *the pinky.* He then smiled at looked at it for some time like it was the greatest thing in the world. He was smart. He was working them! I knew he didn’t like it, but his response was very deliberate so that it would ensure future dinners and gifts once again.

When it was my turn, I too said, “Thank you.” I nodded to the sponsor and his friends who also sat around the table, and accepted the gift, just as my uncle had done.

I stared at it for a long time, before I pulled the gold over my head. It was very thick and looked like something Run DMC would wear. Once it was on, I nodded. I knew I probably looked a little ridiculous and couldn’t help doing what I did next. I folded my arms in a very hip-hop fashion and did the best Jam-Master Jay pose that I could.

That sponsor treated me like a king that night, but it was all downhill from there. I never saw him again, but my uncle saw him many times after that.

MORE TOUR

That tour was tough on the FMW bus. We would drive ten or twelve-hour drives every single day. We were running in small farm towns all over Japan. We did really well for ourselves in those “East Butt-Fuck” podunks because the big wrestling companies never went there. Since there was often nothing to do in those little towns, we often sold out with every show despite the fact that most of the guys on the card couldn’t work.

The tiny towns really sucked for us though. There was never much of anything to eat there, with no restaurants. And with the massive travel time, there also was no time for a hotel. Most often we would leave the show as say midnight, then have to drive another eight to ten hours to the next town. It didn’t always make sense. Sometimes we would get there at like 5 or 6 in the morning after a brutal, bumpy dirt road ride. Then, we would get out and look for a place to sleep on the floor in the arena.

One night, there were some Korean fighters there who certainly thought the match was real. They didn’t speak any English, so there was no way in smartening them up. During the match, when they tried to do something to my uncle, I would just hop the ropes and nail them as hard from behind as I could, taking them down. As for the rest of them, it wasn’t really a worked-shoot like UWFi. They knew something was up.

Onita wouldn’t say what to do in the ring, but he would say something like, “Don’t kill each other,” and then tell them who would win.

Sheik was one of the most attacked wrestlers everywhere in the world, but he always held his own. In Japan, it was odd, because fans didn’t really attack him, but they would swarm from everywhere to touch him.

I remember one night, we saw what seemed like hundreds of people who were clearly afraid of The Sheik, but running over to him. The curious thing that happened was they were sneaking up to him as he was making his entrance and they were just like trying to tag him and run away.

What the hell is this?

What I found out later is that the Japanese culture can be very superstitious. One belief is that if you touch something or someone who you are very afraid of, you will get good luck. So because The Sheik was so feared, everybody was trying to do this. While this was a great sign that he was super feared in Japan, it was also a pain in the ass and hindering his path to the ring. He had to dodge countless fans on his entrance trying to get

a little of that little bit of good luck. It almost looked like a herd of lepers trying to touch Jesus to get healed.

Because the touchers were more than doubling his entrance time for part of the tour, I remember Onita deciding to have Kevin Sullivan and myself come out to the ring with Sheik as his entourage. This had nothing to do with any kind of storyline or anything, we were just there to deflect the touchers so The Sheik could make his way to the ring.

BREAKING FREE

The crazy “anything goes” style of wrestling that FMW was known for was perfect for what I wanted to do in the ring. They had all a number of weird mixes like Judo fighters versus boxers, but they also did ridiculous gimmick matches. After I came along, it wasn’t unheard of to eventually see an “Electrified Barbed Wire Barricade Double Hell Explosion Match” on their card. That is the mentality they had for being different. It is this mentality that allowed me to show off my creativity and use their ring as an open playground. I got to be myself.

It was the first place I worked in where it was okay to hurt your opponent. Now, I don’t mean you should, but if you did, you wouldn’t get in trouble for it. Other promotions, they would dock your pay or fire you. At FMW, they would more or less just pat you on the back.

Tables.

I had seen wrestlers go through tables before, and it always got a great response. In the past, however, you would only see a wrestler doing a piledriver, or throwing their opponent through it. But the very first time I did a table spot in Japan, I needed it to be different. I wanted to incorporate tables into all of my matches because I wanted it to be my signature.

So the first time I used a table, I did a moonsault onto a person that was lying on it.

As far as guys going through tables in matches as part of my character, most people credit me as being the first one to do. Back then, you couldn’t just reach under the ring and pull one out. There weren’t any under there because that idea didn’t exist yet. That’s a weird idea, by the way. *I will pull*

a table out from under the ring and use it today, but not because I really want to. More because the promoter is paying me to do it that way.

Today, ringside tables are under the ring. Extra chairs are under the ring. But that seems kind of obvious to me. This idea is not really natural, and it is not how it started out. When I first started working in tables into all of my matches in FMW, I only broke the table because it happened to be at ringside where they had a ring announcer and a timekeeper. I used it because it was right there and made itself available. I didn't want it to look like I had predetermined a spot where I wanted to break a table, and then go looking for a stack waiting for me, being stored under the ring. I mean, why would there even be a stack of tables under the ring other than that? Why would a ladder end up under the ring? It's not impossible, but it's stupid. You try to make sense of why that would even be done. Now, I do it today in matches because that's what promoters want me to do.

Anyhow, at FMW, what I had to use the bell keeper's table. At first, I chose to do to flip onto my opponent outside of the ring and use the impact of my own body as a weapon. That made the most sense and seemed more real to me.

The Japanese tables were massive, by the way. They weren't like particle board folding tables. They were like monstrous thick beams, almost like doors with legs on them.

The first table I went through, broke right on impact and got a great response. After that night, I will admit it, I landed a few time wrestlers on the tables, and they didn't break. When that would happen, we would both like, bounce a little and fall off. It would really hurt, too, but I would just run back up to the ring and do it again until it worked. If the bouncing thing happened that very first time I attempted to moonsault through a table, maybe I would have never continued the idea of pursuing it as becoming part of all my matches. I don't know. Who knows?

Chairs.

With the success of the table, I also decided to use chairs, as well, using the same psychology. For years people got hit with chairs, but nobody really used the impact of their own body to propel the chair as a weapon. That is how the "Arabian Facebuster" came about — where I put it under my own leg and come off the ropes with it between the leg drop.

Then eventually, the promoters wanted me to bring it into the ring with me so that everyone could see it.

FMW's use of foreign fighters for the first ever WWA Brass Knuckles Tag Team Championship tournament also included Heavyweight Boxing Champion Leon Spinks and Louie Spicolli. In the end, the bosses Onita & Tarzan Goto won the Tag Team Tournament on December 9, 1991, defeating Greg Veritchev & Koba Kurtanidzein the finals.

TAKING THE PISS OUT OF IT

On my second FMW tour, Louie Spicolli was back.

Louie was a good guy, but the boy could drink, and with drinking came pissing. That son of a bitch could piss like a racehorse. Apparently, the other boys on the tour didn't like the fact that, on all the already long bus rides, he kept making the driver stop so he could take a trip over to the little boy's room.

"Excuse me," he would say. "Can you stop up ahead at the next station?"

"Arrrggghhh," all the boys would groan every time he said that.

"Brother, why don't you just piss in a bottle, instead," I said. "That way you don't get any heat.

"Good idea," he said.

It was quite a sight to see the chubby blonde headed little troll mashing his meat into a bottle and filling it up with stinky urine in the back of the bus. It was the funniest shit I ever saw.

Later that night after my match, the referee said something about Spicolli having a weak bladder.

"Don't have to worry about that now," I said. "He just pisses while we are riding in the bus now, so we don't have to pull over."

The referee wrinkled up his nose and said the Japanese equivalent of, "That is fucking disgusting."

Later on, that night when they pulled over at a rest stop, Spicolli just poured the bottle out the window. When the referee and the other guys came back to the bus, they saw the big puddle of urine on the pavement.

"You pee out window?!" the ref asked Spicolli.

"No, I went into a bottle first, so we didn't have to pull over."

"No, no more bottle!" he shouted.

The next night, we were driving to the next show. We pulled over to another rest stop somewhere. The referee came back on the bus again, while Spicolli was still away doing his business.

“Look.” I held up a bottle of Iced Tea.

“Nooo...”

“Yep,” I said, working him with the golden-colored liquid. “He’s pissing on the bus again.”

“Last time. Last time!”

The next day, Louie Spicolli was gone.

They fired him, and I felt terrible. I had no idea that they were going to can him over that joke. I felt bad.

I actually liked Spicolli, so after that, I tried my best to make it up to him. Down the road, I pulled some strings and got him booked in ECW. One night at a show, the promoter Paul Heyman claimed that he didn’t have enough to pay Spicolli very well, so they were going to have to cut him from the show.

“I owe him one, Paul,” I said. “I’ll pay him out of my pay. Don’t cut him.”

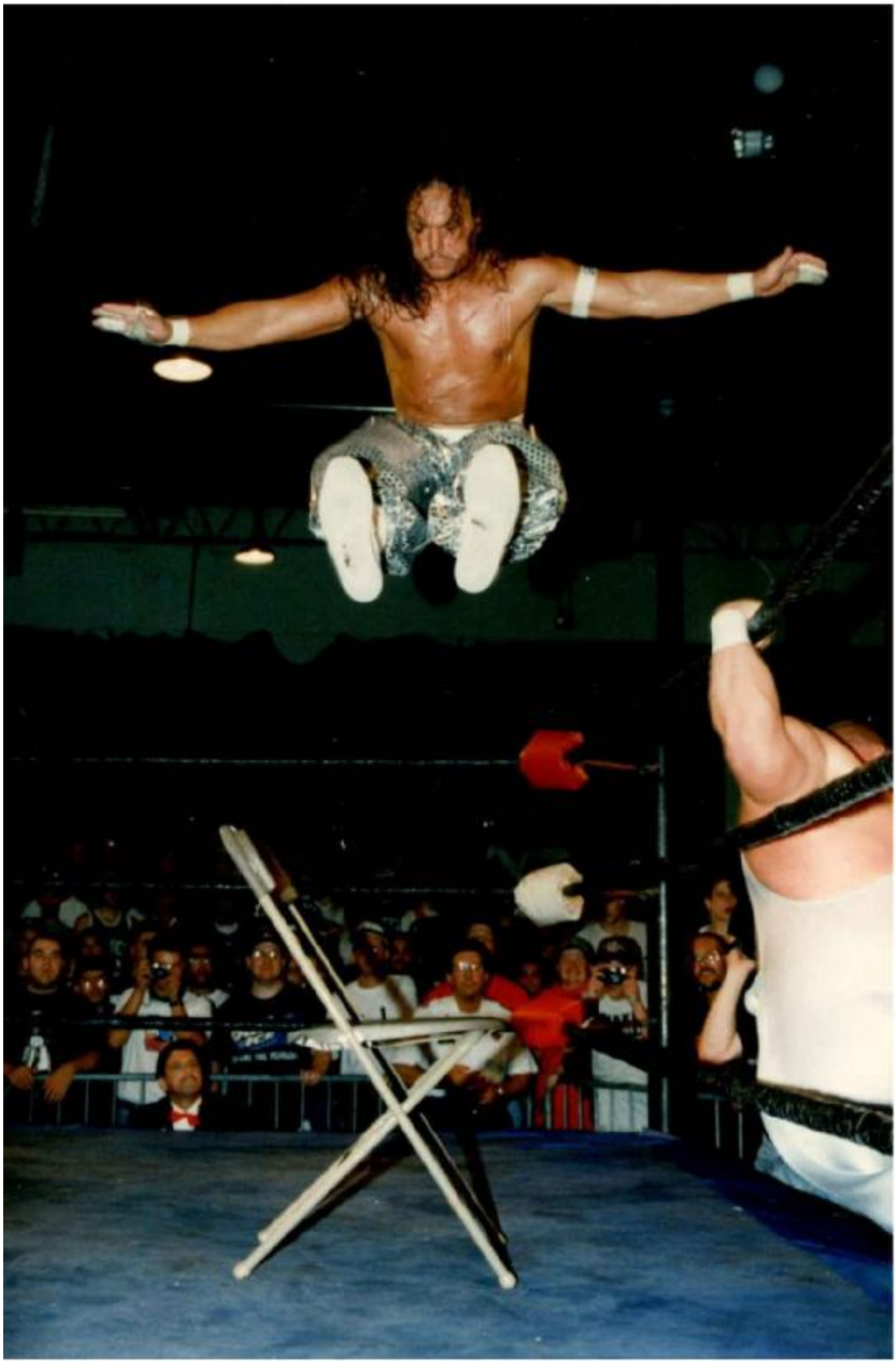
“You’ll pay him?” Paul the cheap bastard asked for confirmation.

“Yes.”

“Done deal.”

It was the least I could do.







Sabu & Onita (ABOVE). Sabu's trademark scars still bleeding as cuts (NEXT PAGE). FMW barbwire matches are where the big famous scars came from. Read on for that at your own risk...



DOWN TO THE WIRE

It wasn't until my second FMW tour that I started doing barbed wire matches; what I eventually became famous for. This is also where I got my famous scars from.

The first barbwire match was February 4th, 1992. The match was Atsushi Onita, Tarzan Goto & Sambo Asako vs. Big Titan (aka The Fake Razor Ramon), Horace Boulder and me. The match had just a few stipulations. It was a “No Ropes Barbed Wire Cage Street Fight Death Match.” Just another day at the office, right?

Anyhow, I took all the bumps because I wanted to. Still trying to establish my name and trying to be looked at as something special, I insisted on taking all the crazy stuff myself. At first, one might think that things turned out badly for me, but actually, it was good. It showed everyone I was different.

When the match was finally done, they pulled me out of there because I was bleeding so badly. Onita pinned Boulder instead of me.

When I got back to the dressing room, everyone congratulated me, but Onita cut the celebration short and told me to get out of there because I was a bloody mess.

“You go hospital,” Onita said.

I shook my head.

“We pay!”

It wasn’t about the money. The office would have paid if I went to go get stitched up, but I just didn’t want to. After getting barbed up for about ten minutes straight and taking all the heat, I was just too tired. I didn’t feel like waiting for an ambulance, getting sutures all over my body, and then figuring out how to get back to my hotel room in the middle of the night.

“It’s no big deal,” I said.

“No big deal?”

“No, I like it,” I lied.

About two nights or so before on the same tour, I had a cut on arm. Someone there had some crazy glue at a desk, I picked it up and put a glob

over the cut. It quickly stopped the bleeding.

“Where did you learn how to do that?” The Sheik asked.

“I saw it on television. I don’t remember the show. Some documentary, I think, saying World War II soldiers used it in the field to stop bleeding until they could get sewed up.”

“I saw that on TV, too,” The Sheik said. “It was MacGyver.”

After that first barbed wire match, I figured I would just give the Superglue another go. *It worked well the first time, so what the hell?* However, when I got back to the hotel, my towel looked like a white rug in a butcher’s shop.

I rinsed off then stood in front of the mirror. I had a number of cuts an inch or two long all over my shoulders and arms. Those were easy. The tough one was the now famous, eight inch one just under my chest and under my rib cage. I used a lot of glue on that one, and it still didn’t stop.

I went over to my gear bag and took out a roll of athletic tape. I put a healthy portion of glue on both sides of the wound, then taped that shit together. I felt like fuckin’ Rambo. After I was done with everything I could reach, I went out into the hall with my torso wrapped like a mummy to enlist some help.

“Hey, bro,” I said to Chris Candido who was rooming with us. Chris was wrestling on the same tour wrestling under the name “The Blonde Bomber.” I think this was his only ever FMW appearance, as he was just there filling in for Kevin Sullivan, which I will explain again more in-depth later on when I talk about Chris in the “ECW Return” chapter.

So, it was that first match is where I received many of the scars you see on my arms and torso. Some are from some other hardcore matches, including over two dozen more no-rope barbed wire death matches I did for FMW. But the biggest one in the center, that was from the very first one.

No regrets.

I didn't mind doing that barbed wire match the first time Onita asked. It was a great way to get noticed. The problem was, I guess I did it all too well. I had no problem with working them once in a while, but eventually, I felt like someone was taking advantage of my easy-going demeanor. Eventually, it seemed like I was only getting booked to do wire matches.

I tried hard in my matches. I didn’t care if I got hurt, as long as everything looked good in the end. I think that’s why Onita and Tarzan just

assumed I wanted to wrestle in barbed wire matches.

If you look back at FMW results today, you will see that the numbers don't lie. My first tour, I had one barbed wire match. The second tour, I had two barbed wire matches. By the third or fourth tour, every match I had was in barbed wire! I mean like out of sixteen matches, I was in fifteen of those matches. At that point, I had to speak up.

"Onita, why do I always wrestle in the wire match?" I asked.

"But you like barbed wire?"

"No, no!" I said, laughing at it. "I don't like it! I don't!"

"No?"

"No! I just do it to help out, but I don't want to do it every night."

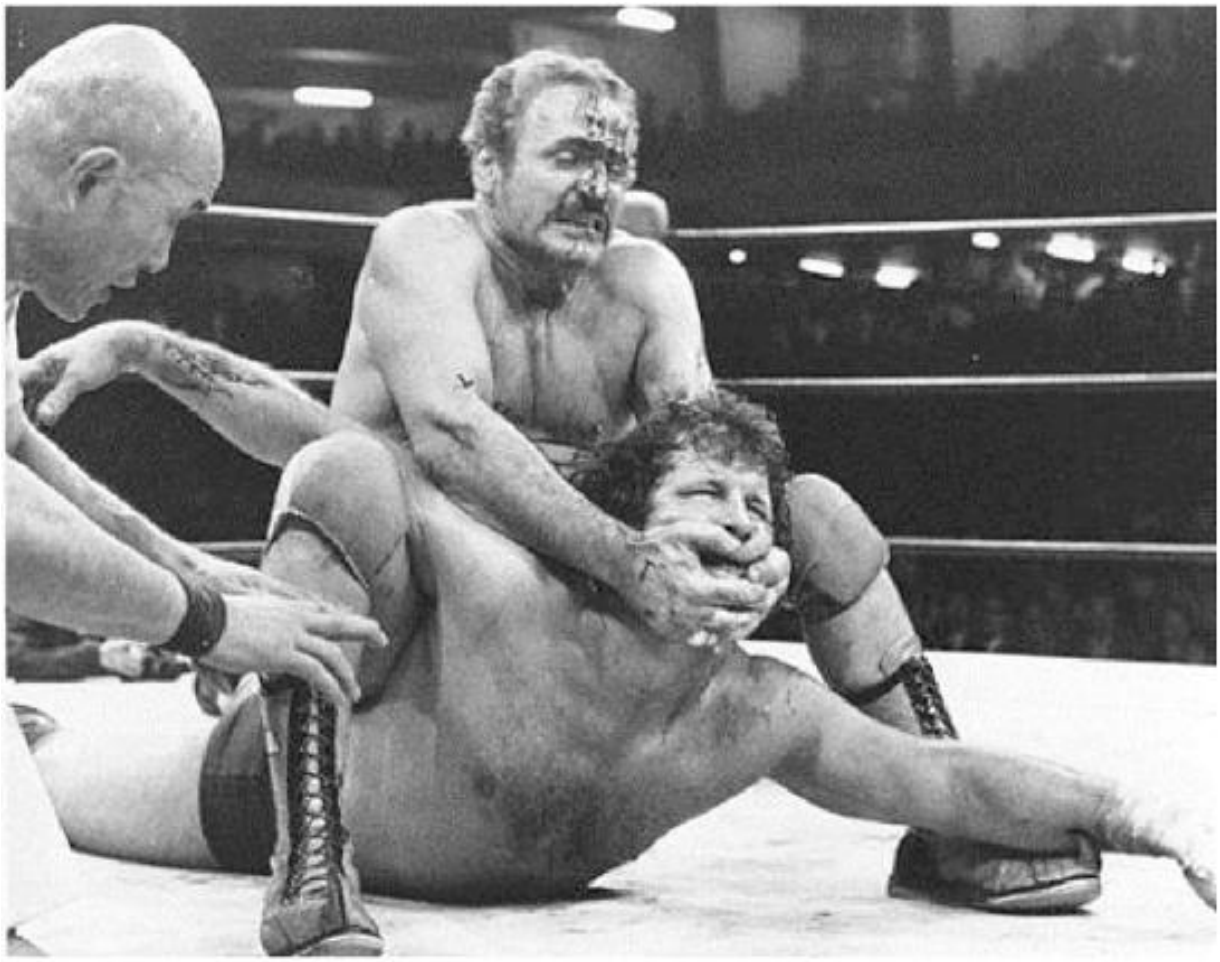
Onita laughed, but he was cool in the end, after talking to him. After that, he let up on the barbed wire bookings. It's a good thing, too, because I was running out of super glue.

Back in May 1991 before my FMW debut later that same year, Horace Hogan, Hulk Hogan's nephew, joined FMW. The summer before my first tour, he formed a very dominant tag team with a fellow *gaijin* wrestler, "The Gladiator" Mike Awesome. The two of them engaged in a long-running feud with Atsushi Onita and Sambo Asako. That continued on into my first appearance. By April 1992, Mike Awesome headed back home as I was returning for my second tour. With some experience already being a good fill-in, I began tagging with Horace. On May 7, 1992, in Tokyo, we defeated Onita and Tarzan Goto for the WWA World Martial Arts Tag Team Championship. They weren't glued around our waists, however. We held those titles for only about a month before we dropped them in Tokyo to Tarzan Goto and Gregory Veritchev.

A GOOD HAND IN THE RING

Speaking of glue, Superglue became my backstage gimmick with the boys. Guys would sometimes buy me some as a joke and give me a tube before our matches. Quite often, I actually took those very tubes and used them too.

Eventually, I started working my first matches with Terry Funk in Japan. I loved working with him. He had a history with the Sheik, so it was cool to continue that legacy.



Having worked with my uncle a good deal back in the day, the Funker was always open to whatever I wanted to do. Speaking of open, our work was so intense that I both busted open and broke my hand our very first match of the FMW program.

I was a trooper. I knew I had just started to get the ball rolling for me, and I wasn't about to cancel some matches because of a silly hand injury. I just kept re-gluing it after every match after that, so much so that it got infected.

The next night, I glued the hell out of it. The glue was gold because it held in the blood and the puss. However, I have to admit, the glue didn't hold in the pain. I had had teeth knocked out, bones chipped, and broken fingers, but that hand injury felt like I had an everlasting evil bitch of a hornet sting that just wouldn't go away.

"Terry," I said back in the locker room.

"Yeah, kid."

“Look, I just need to stay away from my right hand tonight,” I said. “It’s a mess.”

During our match, we worked around it. Terry was a class act. He made it a point to keep my hand out of harm’s way. Everything went well until the very end when I moonsaulted Terry through a table. When I went to lift my arm up to go for the pin, I couldn’t. My right hand was somehow stuck.

I looked down and saw that long wooden shard stabbed me through the hand, like a knife — the same hand that was already infected. It came right down on a sharp spike of wood, breaking my knuckle and the lower tendon in my middle finger.

I only had one more night left in the tour, and I didn’t go get it worked on until I was done. So that final night, I didn’t want to take any chances. I took a saucer-sized Tupperware plate and taped it to my open palm. It looked like a ping-pong paddle attached to my hand.

People came up to me all night after our match and asked, “Is that a gimmick?”

“No,” I replied. “It was so painful, I couldn’t use it if I wanted to.”

MY TURN WITH THE YAKUZA

Come my second year with FMW, things really started to take off. Japan had really put me on the map. The magazines were featuring me on their covers, and I was getting tons of bookings everywhere.

When I returned, more Yakuza members had caught wind of me, and this time they were planning to offer me sponsorship, myself.

In Japan, “Yakuza” means like a mob or the mafia. With some members being somewhat violent in nature, they were often big fans of fighting sports. Therefore, they often wanted to take the boys out to eat just so they could hang with them, just like they did with us on that first tour where they gave us the jewelry.

Even in our neck of the woods, you can see a relationship between organized crime and wrestlers. Back in the day, word has it that even Bruno Sammartino had been encouraged to pay for “protection” by a couple of Italians that he honestly didn’t want around. Another case of this was when

Dino Bravo smuggled cigarettes across the Canadian border and got him seventeen bullets in the back of his head in return.

In Japan, the yakuza have been historically responsible for all kinds of crime, from prostitution, to drug dealing, to the forced selling of stolen goods, to illegal gambling. They even the forced of landowners to sell their land cheap so they could flip it for a profit.

The yakuza were even pretty extreme with their own gang members. *Yubitsume* is a pretty sick form of yakuza loyalty that has to do with cutting off a finger, as a symbol of apology. It is typically self-inflicted and done when someone has either made a mistake or acted in a way that is upsetting to the head of their group. The first time they piss off the boss, the offender cuts off the tip of his left little finger and gives it to his boss as a peace offering. This shows power. Just as one might expect, *yubitsume* starts with the tip of the left pinky, then down to the knuckle, then down to the hand. The cutting order moves to the ring finger, and so on and so forth, working backward all the way to the thumb. If you are a bad boy, in theory, you would have nothing left but a palm and a wrist.

This insanity traces back a long time. Since the seventeenth century, this ritual's origin was born from the risk of not being able to grasp a Japanese sword to protect themselves. You see, starting with the little finger and moving up the hand, the loss of fingers progressively weakens the grip on your sword. A weak sword grip would force a member of yakuza to pledge more trust and reliance on their group for protection

The yakuza members wish to appear tough to intimidate non-members, and thus impose their will on people. Some of the more important members have what are called *irezumi* tattoos, worse than the tribal ink you see on The Rock and some of the other Samoan wrestlers. These are painful, hand-poked full-body tattoos created by inserting ink beneath the skin using handmade tools with needles of sharpened bamboo or steel. And yes, they say these full body tattoos include ink all the way up to their ballsacks.

On the flipside of things, sometimes the yakuza and their shenanigans led to a sort of forced success of some wrestling promotions. Sometimes, they had an interest in a show and forced people to buy tickets. Sometimes, an area had bad police who would actually force people to buy tickets to a wrestling show that yakuza had some kind of investment stake in, rather than to pay for a speeding ticket.

I remember getting a really good payday one night and Onita telling me it was because it was a sold-out show.

“Sold out?” I asked. “Well, where were all the people?”

“Yakuza sold the tickets,” he said. “That means people would buy from them, but sometimes the ticket holders are too afraid to actually come to the show.”

They were a little scary, I cannot lie. Sometimes you would hear good things about the yakuza, but other times, you would hear the bad. While they might throw their money around certain wrestlers, there were also cases where they would stick around to try to rob athletes right after they got paid, knowing they had a lot of cash on them.

One night during my second FMW tour, a number of yakuza were waiting for me at the far side of the lot after my match as I was trying to make my exit before the fans. As I rushed out on my way, they called for me.

“Sabu?” one said.

“*Sabu?!*” another said.

I kept my head down low and pretended not to hear them until I absolutely could not any longer. As I looked up, I was completely surrounded. I dropped my bags and put up my fists.

They laughed.

“No, no, no,” one of the said in broken English. “No fight. EAT!”

“Eat?” I asked.

“Yes,” another said. “We the sponsors.”

Besides the experience I had with my uncle, who was considered a bonafide legend to most, I had heard other tales in the past how they were always very generous with their money to certain newer guys they thought might become somebody.

Mike Awesome said they brought him out to eat Kobe beef once before, and the place they went to was like a castle. He said if he had done the math correctly, it was something like $400 a steak. He said it was the best meat he had ever eaten, so I was intrigued at the offer. It had been a long night, but I was hungry.

“Yes!” I said. “EAT?!”

They nodded. I was skeptical as they collected my belongings and ushered me into a long white Cadillac. If it was a work, I was screwed, but

as usual, I decided to risk it.

With the Japanese, it is always about eating fresh. They often bragged about how the fish you were eating had just been caught this morning, or the chicken had just had its head cut off the night before. This meal, however, took freshness to a new level.

I sat down at this very nice yakuza-owned restaurant. I was still a little bit jet-lagged but was hoping for the best.

About six yakuza members surrounded me at a big table. They were all laughing, and they were taking pictures with me. They were nice enough, but I honestly couldn't wait to eat and just get out of there.

The soup came out. I nodded at their hospitality and ate it quickly. I had already learned that slurping loudly was a compliment, so I made it a point to do so. Then, finally, the main event came.

The crowd cheered in excitement as the attractive little mama-san brought out a tray of something that I didn't readily recognize. When she finally sat her tray on a stand next to me and put a large bowl into the middle of the table.

This doesn't look like Kobe beef to me.

It wasn't. What it was was a giant bowl of little squids, and you want to talk about freshness? Those motherfuckers were still alive and squirming!

I watched as one member missing two full fingers fished one of those little monsters out of the bowl. The little pink thing was squirming left and right, trying to escape the evil clutches of his chopsticks, but to no avail. Then, he dipped it into some kind of sauce that immediately killed it on impact. The tentacles went limp, just before he put it into his mouth.

He slurped it up like spaghetti.

The rest of the table followed suit, as I pushed my seat slowly away from the table and smiled.

"You!" one said, slapping me on the shoulder.

I laughed, "No, you!"

Eventually, I dug around in the bowl and found the smallest, deadest looking one of the bunch. I spooned it up and kicked it back as fast as I could. It was a gross jizz-like consistency and fucking disgusting. After that, I settled for eating some rabbit food that was basically only on the plates as a garnish.

At the end of the night, the group dropped me back off at my hotel, just in time to catch up with a returning Mike Awesome.

“Hey!” he said. “I know those guys.”

“Oh, yeah,” I said. “Are they the ones who gave you the Kobe?”

“No, but they brought me to my Japanese first bathhouse for a happy ending,” Mike Awesome said.

“Oh?” I laughed. “How was that?”

“Pretty good,” he said. “Pretty good, that is if you like getting jerked off by your grandmother.”

SABU vs. YAKUZA

The jizz squid wasn’t my last unfavorable encounter with the yakuza.

In many of the Japanese matches I have wrestled on, I could always see them. I knew right where the yakuza were sitting at ringside, and I also knew that many of them had egos and were pretty much just assholes. You see, they felt that since they had some money in the game, they felt like they were supposed to be treated like untouchables or something. You see, more of them than not had egos a mile high, and they wanted to be fashioned as being dignitaries.

Just like the particular vibe, I picked up on with the sponsors who took my uncle and me out for dinner that one time, the yakuza had their unwritten rules. Wrestlers from out of the country were always told never to bring the match outside of the ring where the yakuza were sitting. They had attitudes and were the kind of guys who may decide to take things a little too far, just to get a kick out of their friends.

On one particular evening, I recognized the yakuza sitting at ringside, and I just didn't care. I knew the yakuza members had a history of needing to look like bad asses in front of their peers, but I wasn’t going to let that bullshit stand in the way of having a good match.

If they try and make an example of me, I will knock their teeth out.

I was working a match against one of the locals, and he fell outside of the ring. As he walked around to the ring steps, he stopped to rest. He positioned himself perfectly for a baseball kind of slide under the bottom

ropes. I knew exactly where the yakuza were sitting, but I didn't let that information make me change what I was going to do for the good of the show. I slid into my opponent for a home run, then picked him up and slammed him right into the middle of them.

They looked at me like I just farted in church. I could tell they were saying the equivalence of "We should kick your ass! How dare you?" to me in Japanese, but I didn't understand a word of it. The Japanese fans knew the deal. Most fans loved being near the action but knew that if a wrestler fell into the crowd, you backed up and let the show continue. However, these assholes were squaring up with me for invading their space. Their tough guy territorial act pissed me off tremendously, so I turned around and walked away.

But I was only getting a running start.

I backed up, and then I ran as fast as I could to hit my opponent again with a suicide dive. My feet flew right into the crowd where the yakuza were sitting.

The circle spread out again, then closed in on me even tighter. Immediately, a couple of well-inked yakuza closed started shoving me. One of them got right in my face, chin to chin, like boxers do in the weigh-in.

"You aren't so tough," I said. "Fuck you." Before he knew what hit him, *I was hitting him.*

Two of them grabbed me. I started throwing punches at them, too. I did pretty well for a moment, until about a dozen little reinforcements came at me out of nowhere.

"Oh, shit!"

Even though they were all smaller than me, there were just too many. I hopped over the guardrail, in a real "feet-don't-fail-me-now" moment. I hit the ground running. They chased me right down the aisle and into the back locker room area.

Once I made it to a clearing, I nailed a few of the scrawniest looking yakuzas you ever saw with some massive haymakers. They went down, too, but it was no use. In no time at all, I was being flooded by probably a dozen or so guys, and they were beating on me pretty hard.

"What in the hell?!"

Stomp! Punch! Kick!

Those little Japanese Oompa Loompas were tough.

What a way to die. Death by a dozen midgets.

I looked up from the floor and took a stiff kick to the ribs. Then, about a foot above their heads, I could just barely make out a much bigger head, bobbing out of a dressing room door and right towards me.

Was it the “Big Boss?” Was it the yakuza’s secret weapon of destruction? The answer was no.

It was Awesome. *Mike* Awesome.

He was getting dressed right nearby when he heard the commotion as the midget mob rushed by his locker room. Now, before this tour, I wasn’t a big fan of him. He came off a little loud, but I just didn’t know him yet. I thought maybe he was a little full of himself, or selfish. I didn’t know what he thought of me, but I have to say, he did not hesitate to help out a brother in need.

At this point, it was like fucking Gulliver Travels. I couldn’t move. Three of the Munchkin Mafia members were holding me down and one was holding a chair leg right above my throat, sizing me up to see if he could stab it down into me.

The wrestler also known as “The Gladiator” for good reason pushed through the mob and made it to the center. He saw the one standing over me with the chair, while another was attempting to push my hands away from my face with his foot. The wiry bastard had given up on my throat and was now trying to position the leg of that folding chair directly over my temple, so he could stab it straight down into my skull. These guys were fucking dirtier than anything you ever saw on the Wizard of Oz.

Mike went from zero to eighty in no time. He shifted right into beast mode. Now, for those of you who never saw him before, he was a monster. He was 6’7” and about 300-something pounds. Next to a typical Japanese man, he was real-life Godzilla. That is why he was getting bookings in Japan in the first place.

Mike jumped right into the pig pile. First, he grabbed the member attempting brain surgery with a chair leg and threw him against a wall. There was a loud crash, and he slid down the cinder blocks like a wet ragdoll. Another guy ran at Mike and tried some Kung Fu shit, but Mike was just too big. Mike knocked him the hell out with one punch.

The mob backed off a moment. They couldn’t believe it. Mike started to unbury me, one by one, picking the members up off of me and winging

them down the hall like bags of garbage.

“You okay, brother?”

“Yeah,” but before I could even thank him, we saw reinforcements. Even more of the yakuza were running down the hall at us, coming from the other side of the curtain.

Mike cleared the path swinging his arms like machetes until we made it into a nearby locker room for shelter.

Before we could secure the door, it looked almost like a scene out of a zombie movie. We had to push the door shut from the inside, against the weight of the bodies pushing behind it, before we could lock the door.

We were both blowing up. Gasping for air, we finally both started laughing.

“Hey man, thanks,” I said. “I guess you aren’t called Awesome for just nothing.”

“No problem,” he said.

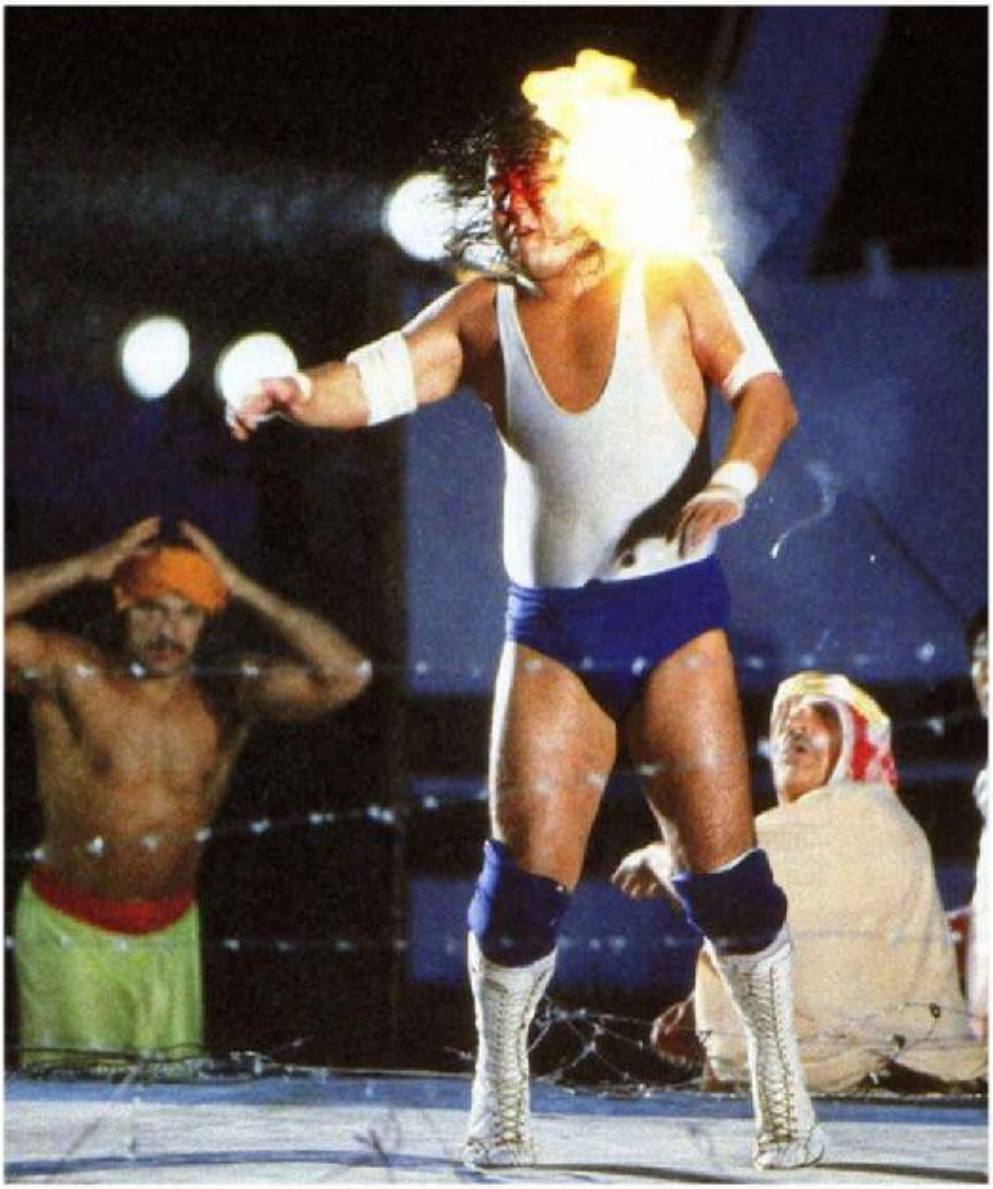
We both leaned up against the wall and dropped to a seated position.

The pounding on the door started. Listening to the more experienced Japanese wrestler in the room, when Mike told me to “move away from the door in case one of them has a gun,” I did just what he said without hesitation.

For about twenty minutes, yakuza members banged and banged and banged. The knocking slowed, but they didn’t go away. They made several death threats and were beyond pissed. Every half hour or so, we would crack the door open to see if the coast was clear, and then the pounding would start all over again.

We stayed in that fucking room for almost two hours, because the yakuza absolutely refused to leave. Eventually, some kind of security came and guarded the door. The yakuza continued to threaten to stab both of us when we left. After a while, security members talked them down and tensions eased. Finally, the remaining yakuza left.

After that night, I was one of the biggest Mike Awesome fans around.





With all of the fireballs being throwing around in Japan (Onita ABOVE & Terry Funk LEFT), it only made sense to have a "Fire Match."

The Sheik drew heat using fire his whole career (NEXT PAGE: Eddie Creachman TOP, Sabu BOTTOM.)




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THE FIRE MATCH

I had been doing a bunch of brutal barbed wire matches until Onita decided to give me a break from that scene and change things up for me.

How do we top barbed wire? Light the wire on fire.

After seeing much success with all the barbed wire matches and exploding barbed wire matches, Onita decided to raise the measuring stick. When he was down in Puerto Rico, he saw another dangerous match that wouldn't cost him as much as the exploding barbed wire gimmick would. Instead of explosions, he decided to steal the idea of a Puerto Rican fire match were they lit the ropes on fire, and add it to the no ropes barbed wire matches they were already having.

So come May 6, 1992, I was booked at the Hyogo Sanda City for an outside show in front of 5,011 fans. I found myself teaming with my uncle, The Sheik, in a Ring of Fire Death Match against our regular ring enemies, Atsushi Onita & Tarzan Goto.

For this brainchild of a match from Onita, the ring again had its ropes replaced with barbed wire. But to keep them ignited, they used sheets soaked in gasoline wrapped strategically around each one.

When the match finally started, the ring crew lit approached the aprons and lit the sheets on fire using torches. It was quite a spectacle. Being outside, the winds were kind of strong that day. They started picking up before the match. And as any science teacher will tell you, oxygen fuels fire.

We started the match. In the meantime, the wind had already knocked pieces of the ignited sheets down onto the apron. The thing was, there was also kerosene on the canvas! It had dripped off the sheet cloth and down onto the mat.

We really couldn’t do anything. The fire was a huge distraction, and therefore, the match was the shits. Before we could really do anything, we were worrying more about our safety than putting on a show. It would really be something if we lasted any more than two minutes long.



So there we were, surrounded in flames, and then came the heat.

It was fucking unbearable.

“What the hell do we do?” I shouted to Onita.

It was getting so hot that the fire was actually turning the barbed wire red. I knew that staying in the ring any longer than that, and we were going to be screwed.

Finally, Onita waved his arms. Following Onita and Goto’s lead, I quickly got out of the ring, diving through the flames the best we could. But when I turned around, I couldn’t believe my eyes.

“Sheik!” I yelled. “Get out!”

My slower-moving, 65-year-old uncle was still in the ring with crazy fire beginning to burn down everything in sight.

Just in time, a few young boys rushed to the scene with some extinguishers. The spray did just enough to subside a hole large enough in the flames, so The Sheik could slowly crawl his way to exit.

After he was ushered to safety, they rushed my uncle to the hospital for smoke inhalation and third-degree burns. He was pretty beat up, but fortunately, he was okay.

In the meantime, the entire area was covered in black smoke. There was no way for fire trucks to make it to the site of the fire and, in turn, that thing burned for something like nineteen hours. There was nothing left of that ring in the end but a burnt ring frame and a pile of ashes. Even the barbed wire had completely burnt up.

In the end, it was declared a no contest. The match ended with no winner. But nobody could argue with Onita on that one.

Although it wasn’t the worst, in the end, that fire match got the most HEAT out of the whole tour.



CHAPTER 6 – WWF Tryout

After Japan, I started up with Extreme Championship Wrestling. Now, before I even get into that massive subject and part of my life, I first have to mention that I was a blip on the radar in New York, early on.

The first few months that I was working for ECW, I was bringing a whole new style to that company. So immediately, my influence was helping to put that promotion on the map. This little promotion was coming out of nowhere and ECW was gaining a buzz around them as becoming the only viable alternative to the cartoony WWF product.

More people were watching ECW than we had imagined possible. What I didn't know was that "Big Brother" was watching, too.

Because Vince McMahon had pretty much taken over the wrestling industry by this point, the territories were pretty much all dead. From what I understand now is, Vince had his eye on the new extreme world and looked at it as being competition. Other than WCW, there was nobody out there that he continued to be a threat, and I don't think he liked the idea of some assholes in Philadelphia coming along to take a piece of the pie.

For me, taking the ECW road looked like it could quite possibly pay off. I knew it was catering to a demographic of hardcore fans who really liked realism in their wrestling. Sure, there was WCW, but they were no longer offering that NWA wrestling-style product. WCW was starting to mirror what Vince was putting out there.

ECW started to sell out arenas, and Paul Heyman recognized that what I was bringing to the table (by going through tables) was working. It didn't take a genius to realize that I should be on the top of the card, and because of that, Paul did just that and started paying me pretty well.

That is when Vince McMahon started to notice some wrestler named "Sabu."

So at some point in 1994, the phone rang, and JJ Dillon left a message on my message machine. Yes, he was the very same famous manager of the Four Horseman from NWA and WCW fame, and he had been paid for and bought by the WWF. JJ was now acting as a booker for Vince. Now, I had already drunk the ECW Kool-Aid and had no real desire to work for New York, but Coincidentally, JJ Dillon had also been trained by my uncle. Because of that, I had to at least give him a phonecall back.

“Hello, Terry,” JJ said. “First off, I just wanted to let you know that me and your uncle, we go way back.”

Not knowing really what to say to that, I responded with the first pleasantry that I could think of. “That’s nice.”

“Yes, good man,” he said. “Anyhow, I called to tell you that we wanted to offer you a tryout in New York.”

“Is it paid?”

“Well, yes. Yes, it is.”

“What’s it pay?”

Being a little offset by the idea that maybe I was more interested in a payday than the potential opportunity of working for the biggest wrestling promotion in the world, there was a long pause before he answered. “Um, $300 a night.”

“Could you do four?”

A few weeks later, I traveled to the land of the giants. I pulled up in my rental and headed into the locker room. When I walked in, I saw that it was true. The dressing rooms were crawling with massive bodies that made some of the ECW guys look like midget wrestlers. A few of the really big guys eyeballed me as I rolled in my carry-on gear bag and looked for a safe corner.

The thing about it was, I was not there to steal anyone’s spot. In the unlikely event that I did think about sticking around if anything I would have created my own spot. I smaller guy like me wasn’t going to go in and steal a big guy’s place on the show. I could never be bigger than one of those guys, or wrestle like that. But I figured if I wrestled in my own style, I wasn’t competing with those other guys, I was offering something new, something different.

Either way, those guys didn’t know that I was basically there for a payday. I had already bought into Paul Heyman’s pipedream and really thought that was the place to be for me at that time.

The first night, I went out at the start of the show to work against Scott Taylor, aka the guy who would go on to do the worm in the “Too Cool” tag team, *Scotty 2 Hotty.*

Before the match, I talked to Vince about what I could and could not do. I knew my style was not for everybody yet, especially in his bright and flashy cartoon world. I will admit, I was a little intimidated by him at first, but

didn’t let my shyness stop me. Knowing it was quite possible that he had never seen one of my matches, I explained to him some of what I did. He didn’t buy into me using the tables and the chairs, but he did give me the green light to do all the wild stuff off the ropes and outside of the ring.

“My guys told me you were different, so I want to see an example of what you can do,” he said.

They decided to try me out against Scott Taylor. Scott was a great technical wrestler and was perfect for me to show off that I knew all the basics to Vince and his team. However, I don’t think Scott understood all the crazy stuff I was proposing, so we kept had to keep our match somewhat simple.

The next day, Vince came up to me and offered me a job. I guess only seeing the one or two little bits of the Sabu flavor that we threw into the match was good enough. Taken back by the quick offer without really seeing what I could do, I felt the urge to stall a little. I wanted him to really see what my style was all about.

“What I did last night wasn’t exactly me, and the way I usually work,” I said. “I’d like you to see more what I can do. Maybe with someone else.”

Vince got the hint. “You did just fine out there. I liked it. But if you want to show what else we would be buying, it sounds good to me,” Vince replied. “Tonight, we will put you with someone else then.”

So that night, they gave me Owen Hart.

Now, Owen was just incredible. In Calgary Stampede Wrestling, he had worked with people from all around the world. He knew I was innovative and had some elements of the Japan-style with maybe even some traces of Lucha in there. So when I described what I wanted to attempt during my second WWF tryout match, Owen got it. He immediately understood what I wanted to do and was all about it.

Our match that night opened the show, and the shirts-and-ties were in the back watching. There was a full house at the monitors, and everything came off without a hitch. When we were done, I felt like we both did very well.

When I made it back to the locker room, Bret Hart was the first to come up to me. I was talking with his brother Owen, and he stopped to shake my hand.

“That was really great,” he said. “I’ve been hoping someone like you would come along.” Bret continued to say how good we were together and

that he was very happy with the match. Bret was definitely a leader in the locker room by this point, so that meant a lot. While he was looking at me favorably, it is funny though. Most of the other guys in the locker room were there still giving me the evil eye.



The thought back then was as a professional wrestler in the WWF locker room, you needed to protect your spot. Guys didn't want to take personal time off, or even time off for an injury. By the time you got back, someone else would be working there instead of you. Competition.

It was fear of the unknown. I think a lot of the guys may have looked at me as a threat because I was standing in front of them and I was something entirely different to what they knew. I looked different and I wrestled different. The thing about it was, if I did decide to go there, I wasn't looking to take over and bump people out of their spots. I figured I would again be making up my own spot, *something that didn't exist there yet.*

Vince offered me a job again. I told him I really needed to think about things, but he insisted I stick around for another night and another payday, so I did. The next night I worked with Scott Taylor again, but this time, we worked some more of my crazy style in.

The next morning, Vince met me at the hotel to offer me a gimmick.

“We don’t really want to hire names, now,” he explained. “We are more looking to make our own.”

What he proposed was $250,000 to me to take on “The Sultan” gimmick. The idea was I would dress up almost like an evil genie, but with a mask over my nose and mouth. Knowing that talking wasn’t my strong suit, the idea was that The Sultan didn’t have a tongue, and the mask would ensure that the proposed character wouldn’t talk at all, either.

I was on the fence. Jumping on board with the WWF meant that I wouldn’t be able to work the big shows over in Japan anymore, and I also wouldn’t be able to continue on with ECW, which seemed promising. I had heard a lot of horror stories about how you would come in to work for New York, and then you would eventually get lost in the shuffle. In ECW, I knew I was set to be a main player in a promotion that was starting to take off. The potential was great.

Vince gave me a few weeks to think about it. I called up one day with almost the intent to start up with them, but I had one more question.

“I know you had talked about having a manager for me as The Sultan,” I said. “Any idea who you are thinking about using?”

He mentioned Bob Backlund, but then he threw in talk of using the Iron Sheik as my uncle. I thanked him for the opportunity and said I would call him back, but that call would never happen.

Booking the Iron Sheik as my “uncle” was a huge symbol of disrespect to me at the time. My mindset was that changing my name and modifying my look was one thing. They wanted to own me and the likeness they would promote for merchandise reasons. I was okay with this to some degree. However, for the Iron Sheik to be my uncle, I told my friends what that was — it was just plain ignorant. If my uncle would have seen that pairing on TV, that would have been bad news. Seeing me hang out with a cheap, WWF welfare rip-off version of The Sheik would not have gone over well. If he saw that, Ed Farhat would have probably died from a heart attack years than he did.

Today, when I look back at what could have been, sometimes I wish I had taken his offer. I could have maybe kept the Iron Sheik out of the deal by negotiating or something, I don't know. I just wonder what would have happened if I took it.



Anyhow, it's a good thing Vince didn't already have that expensive custom costume made up for me. There is no way my replacement, Rikishi Fatu, would have fit his large chunky ass into it if he had.

Either way, after that tryout, I knew where I was going. I was going to ECW.

TOMMY DREAMER on EARLY ECW SABU

One day while we were still putting the building blocks of ECW together, Paul Heyman brought me over to his house and put a tape into his VCR.

Something on that tape captivated me. It was wrestling, but not like any wrestling I had ever seen before. I just couldn't believe what I saw happening in the ring.

This same tape also had two comedians talking over pro wrestling matches. They were making fun of the wrestlers who were destroying their bodies. When I first started watching, I was laughing at it all, but slowly I was getting more and more angry at their insults. But then, I stopped hearing what they had to say, and it all just seemed to stop.

On the screen, I finally saw something that drowned out all of the sounds. I was memorized by this one person coming to the ring in Japan. The fans there took one look at him and would just scatter! As I watched, there came this enigmatic force like I had never seen before. He was a real wild man - someone who evoked fear in the hearts of the audience.

"Look at that, Paul!" I said. "You can see the fear in their eyes!"

Paul leaned into the set. He squinted. He rubbed his chin. He smiled.

I seriously hadn't seen anything like what I was seeing on the television since The Original Sheik, Bruiser Brody, or maybe Abdullah the Butcher.

As soon as the one wrestler finally made it to the ring, Paul said, "That's Sabu... and this guy is *it*."

I sat and watched him in awe. He was doing things that nobody I previously have mentioned could do. He wasn't just a brawler; he could really wrestle. He could fly in the ring, and he was innovative with chairs. He was using them as weapons and not just swinging them the traditional way. Sabu was so different that he was using a chair as a springboard to actually hurl himself into the audience.

Now, remember, this was in the early 1990s. At this point in time, WCW and WWF were for more kids. Wrestling was so toned down that nothing remotely like what this guy was doing was on television anywhere.

I couldn't believe what I was seeing, and then Paul said, "Watch this!"

Sabu pulled out a table… and the rest is history.

Sabu single-handedly changed wrestling forever, after that. His usage of tables was like life before the internet. Table matches, table chants, TLC

matches, all of that would not be around if it wasn't for the "Suicidal, Homicidal, Genocidal," Sabu.

The scars on his body are a testament to the word "HARDCORE." His uniqueness is something only paralleled along the lines of Andre the Giant levels. It is absolutely no exaggeration when I say that Sabu carried the early years of ECW on his scarred-up back.

I personally held a towel over a massive wound he had just sustained as a doctor said to him, "You need to go to the hospital, right now."

"No, I'm okay," he replied. "Just Superglue it." This was also at a time when medical glue wasn't commonplace yet, either. The doctor couldn't believe it. Sabu needed 140 stitches that night but chose to just glue the hole shut, and he was back in the ring and working the very next week.

To totally understand how much of an impact Sabu has made, you should go back to watch any sport before the game was played as it is actually played now today.

Imagine basketball without the slam dunk.

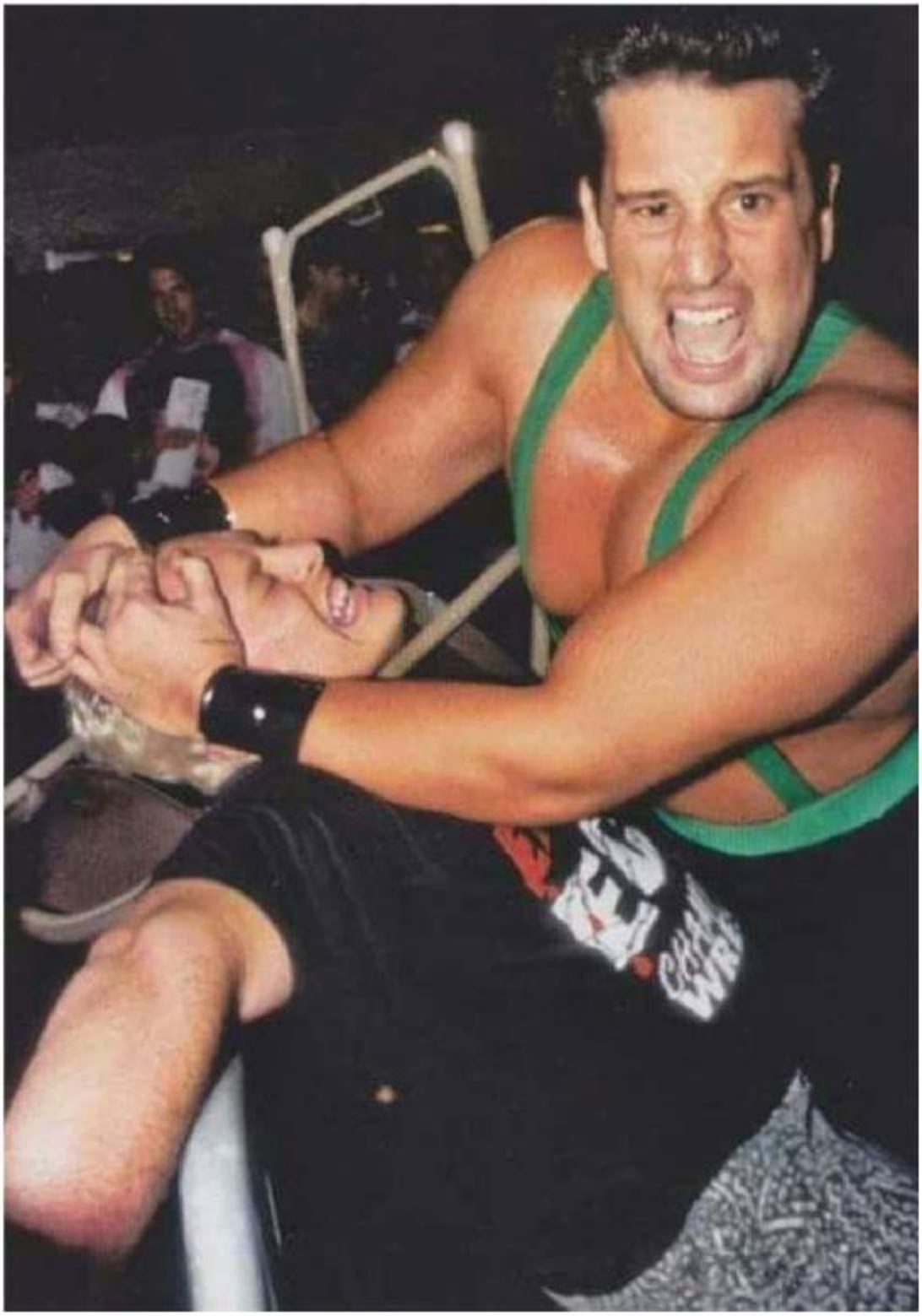
Imagine football when it was just a running game until Air Coryell.

Now, imagine wrestling without Sabu.

Sabu is one of the most iconic wrestlers that changed the wrestling business forever, and now with the rest of this book, you will finally read about how he got there, building ECW block by block, and also, at the same time, building a place for himself in wrestling history.

– Tommy Dreamer

NOTE FROM SABU - *Tommy, thank you so much for your story and kind words, but I just don't get it. Didn't we start with ECW on the same day after I cold-called Tod? There was really a private Sabu tape viewing with Paul first?! LOL!*





CHAPTER 7 – ECW (Round One)

It was 1993. Nine years had passed since I first got in the ring. My uncle mentored me for the first half, but for the second half, I was doing more on my own here and there. In America, times were changing as far as professional wrestling was concerned. The WWF's golden era was coming to the end. People were getting sick of the Hulkster and actually booing him. The little Hulkamaniacs were growing up, but the product wasn't growing up with them. I think it was around this time that the wrestling fans began to crave more reality in their wrestling product. Maturing wrestling fans wanted something new; *something for adults.* They were growing up with the product, and they wanted a more grown-up product that they could relate to.

When I wasn't in Japan, I was working various promotions all over the place getting polished. During this time, I became known as somewhat of a journeyman. There was this strange perception out there that I was this crazy independent guy on the road. Promoters and fans alike started to build a reputation around me as being a gypsy of sorts. I wasn't all that mystic, however. I was really just taking whatever I could and trying to make a living.

Through my travels, I made a lot of contacts. One day, I got a call to work for Paul Heyman for a project he was working on called the "World Wrestling Network." He called me up and talked about a big fusion of independents. It all sounded really good, but just like many other dream tours and pipe dreams, I wasn't sure if it would ever really pan out. However, if Paul had anything, he had charisma. He could make someone believe just about anything.

Around the same time, another guy I knew named Dennis Coralluzzo gave me a call. Dennis was a wrestling promoter for NWA New Jersey and a former president and board member of the National Wrestling Alliance. He talked a little about another high-promising promotion, but mostly just because it was a good payday in a time when this was becoming rare. Dennis said, "You want to make some real good mark money? Hook up with some guy named Tod Gordon in Philadelphia. They say he's paying really well."

"Does he have a TV promotion or something coming up?" I asked.

“No. He’s just a sucker. If he thinks you’re a name, he’ll pay you like $500,” he said.

“I like $500,” I said. “Sounds good to me.” At this point, I really was becoming a journeyman. I was still eating tuna from the can and doing whatever I could to survive. I was traveling all over the place and this $500 deal sounded like a great lead. That much money was almost four times what most promoters where paying guys who weren’t headline main event names.

It’s about time. Mark money. I could use some of that right about now.

Dennis gave me his number, so I gave him a call.

“Hey, Tod. This is Sabu,” I said on the phone. “Dennis gave me your number.”

“Oh, yes,” he said. “The Japan guy.”

“Yes. Can I come in?”

“Sure. What do you want?”

I hesitated. I wanted that tasty $500 payday Dennis put over like there was no tomorrow, but in the last second, the shy Sabu kicked in. I shit my pants and got scared.

“Um, $300,” I said, not wanting him to cut me off.

“$300?”

“Um, yeah,” I said. “Is that okay?”

“No, that’s great. No problem.”

Shit. I could have gotten more!

After that, I was off to Pennsylvania. The first day that I went in to work for Tod in Philadelphia, I found out I wasn’t the only new kid on the block. At the time, Eddie Gilbert was the booker, but he had some kind of falling out with Tod, and he had just got fired from booking. So the very same day that I walked into the ECW locker room for the first time, Paul Heyman was walking in beside me.

“This is Sabu, everyone,” Tod said to the boys in the dressing room. “He will be wrestling for us. And this, everyone, is Paul. He will be replacing Eddie on the book.”

Now, it was really a weird situation. Seeing Paul there as the new guy right along with me made absolutely no sense. He was just telling me how his new network was about to take off, and how it was going to take a lot of work but how that would “pay off in the long run.”

Quite often in the wrestling business, you hear all of these big plans that never come to fruition. A promoter will call you and tell you about a massive tour in the UK that they are going to book you on and then they never call again. A booker will call and tell you how they are all set to bring you in and pay you all this money, and then you will never hear from them again. Since there is so much ego out there, I think that they aren't typically lying to a wrestler when they say this stuff. I think that nine times out of ten that they actually believe that they are so sweet that they can actually pull off whatever it is that they are saying. That is why they sound so convincing; they actually believe what they are saying. However, when reality sets in, they can't pull off whatever it is they were trying to do with their typical shoestring budget and then everything just falls apart and disappears. Delusions of grandeur. Fucking Pipedreams.

It was just weird how the same guy organizing the hottest new thing was going to have time to also book for Tod Gordon. I mean, literally just a few days before I showed up in Philly, I was on the phone with Paul E. who was telling me all these wonderful things about the new WWN. He explained the television deal he was setting up. He talked about all the talent he was going to bring in. Everything sounded really great, but then all of the sudden, here he was showing up to take over the book at ECW?

The Wrestling Network thing sounded awesome, but I then realized it was just like all of the other fantasies I had heard before. Clearly, it wasn't going to pan out. It's weird though because coming from Paul, it felt like it was actually all legit. It didn't seem like he was feeding me a bunch of crap that he wasn't going to be able to pull off like all the others. He really had this strange ability to get you to buy into whatever he was saying, almost like a cult leader.

I had believed every one of those WWN lines he fed me because that was before I knew that he was a good liar.

Don't let interviews kid you where Paul takes credit for finding me. It was not Paul Heyman that brought me to ECW. Dennis led me to the right place at the right time.

SILENCE

One of my commandments mostly from the start was “Thou shall not speak.” For many, one of the most notable aspects of my early career was adopted from my uncle, and that was a refusal to speak. Inheriting this part of gimmick originally stemmed from my uncle’s choice to never speak English in public to protect kayfabe. He wanted people to believe that he really was from overseas and could not speak our language. This made him even more mystical.

Never speaking for me had multiple benefits. For one, early on in my career as Sabu, I was being billed as hailing from Saudi Arabia, or sometimes Bombay, India. By never speaking, nobody would know that, in real life, I was a second generation Lebanese American from Detroit. I wanted the same mystique that my uncle had. Another reason that the silent treatment was good stems from horror movies. When you look at a movie like Friday the 13th, Jason never talked. The hockey mask-wearing butcher didn’t have a conversation with someone before he stabbed the shit out of them. Not hearing why he was doing what he was doing made him even more scary and dangerous. There just was no reasoning with a silent psycho killer.

I can’t lie. Another reason I didn’t talk was that it simply wasn’t my strong suit. I was very shy, honestly, and never felt comfortable on the mic.

In ECW, however, there was so much shit to deal with, however. A lot of the guys were not all that talented at the start so Paul Heyman would give them a gimmick and a character. Often times, I would have to talk them through a match over the voices of rabid fans, and I am sure that on many occasions, fans probably could clearly hear what I was saying in the ring on TV.

Soon, I am sure that it became fairly common knowledge that I wasn’t really a foreigner from Middle Eastern extraction. People knew that I was an American citizen from birth. Eventually, this is probably why announcers would joke at my expense, billing me from “Bombay, Michigan.”

EARLY ECW

You might know ECW to be the land of hardcore, or maybe the most violent company to ever exist in pro wrestling. However, that isn’t exactly how it was before I got there. Before guys like me, it was actually pretty tame. It wasn’t even called Extreme at the beginning.

ECW initially started out under the name “Tri-State Wrestling Association.” At first, it was owned by a guy named Joel Goodhart. From what I understand, Joel couldn’t cut it and eventually sold the company to his friend Tod Gordon who basically had no experience before that — just so he could get out of the business. Tod didn’t know much, but he at least knew that he needed to change things up. Tri-State wasn’t drawing flies and needed a major facelift. So one of the first things that he did was rename the company Eastern Championship Wrestling.

This early version of ECW debuted at a sports bar in Philadelphia with their very first match under the new name being Jimmy Jannetty versus Stevie Richards. According to what I heard from Stevie Richards say in the past, I guess it was pretty bad. He said that in his own opinion that he sucked in that match and that he wasn't in good shape at all. As for the rest of the matches on that first show, they say that those other matches were just as bad, as well. The wrestlers on it all sucked, and it was overall just a typical shitty indie show.

Eventually, Tod knew he had to get better talent. Instead of cutting back with the low ticket sales, he opened up the purse strings a little to better the quality of the shows. He started having more veterans come in to help him out. Some of the early Eastern Championship Wrestling shows featured guys like Magnificent Muraco, Road Warrior Hawk, Jim Neidhart, and “The British Bulldog” Davey Boy Smith. This eventually led up to using “Superfly” Jimmy Snuka (who was close enough to drive into the shows) to become the first ever ECW Champion. He had hoped that this move would give the new brand credibility among the fans.

At around this point, Tod also brought in "Hot Stuff" Eddie Gilbert to book the shows to make them look better. But, however, things didn’t pan out as he had hoped, and it still all sucked. From what some of the boys in the locker room said, Eddie was on some serious drugs that hurt his creative ability. They say that being so focused on getting a fix caused Eddie not to focus on fixing ECW.

Around this time, Tod had a major falling out with Gilbert and then fired him on the spot. Tod, hearing news that Paul Heyman had just been fired from WCW, brought him in to take Eddie's position. At the same time, that is when he brought me into the mix. I wasn’t the only name recognition they were looking for internationally: It was then that ECW joined the NWA to get some recognition.

The National Wrestling Alliance had a rich history only years before this, but in this era, the NWA was basically dying, if not already dead. After Jim Crockett sold WCW to Ted Turner and WWE just took over the world, the NWA was just an indie company. Despite the fact that they still held onto the idea of being a governing body as they were in the territorial days, they had no television behind it and it was basically a money grab.

Some could argue that it takes a crook to spot a crook. ECW kicked around with the NWA banner for a short time before Paul Heyman recognized that the NWA was only taking money out of their promotion. There was no benefit of working under their decrepit banner, so Paul decided that he wanted to break away from the NWA. So rather than to just cancel their subpar subscription to the name, they decided to work the end of their working relationship into a storyline and one that the NWA knew nothing about.

So Paul and Tod Gordon lobbied to have the NWA let ECW’s top guy, Shane Douglas, win the NWA World title for a run with it in ECW. They agreed. The NWA scheduled Shane to win the NWA World title belt in a tournament taking place on ECW shows.

After he finally won, he made this long speech recognizing everyone who held this belt before him. And then Shane told them all to “kiss his ass,” because it was the beginning of a new era. The era of ECW!

That night, all the fans in the arena chanted “ECW! ECW! ECW!” for the first time ever.

Immediately after denouncing the NWA affiliation, Tod and Paul broke away from NWA behind the scenes for real. Dennis Coralluzzo thought it was a work at first, but after a few days, he realized it was not.

The ECW office soon made the announcement that Eastern Championship Wrestling would be changed to *Extreme* Championship Wrestling. Magazines loved it. They picked the story up everywhere.

It worked.

The spotlight was on ECW.

BREAKING FREE

After dissing the NWA, we knew we needed to keep the ball rolling. ECW started to click, but it wasn't because of an increase in wrestling quality, or some magical direction that Paul had given us. Our success started to come when we actually figured out how to hide the fact that a lot of our guys were the drizzling shits.

It's ironic that ticket sales started to increase because the fans really wanted to see good wrestling, and we really had some very bad wrestlers on every card. I love him but some guys in our locker room like The Sandman had almost no wrestling ability, so to cover up our weaknesses, rather than to have a weak-looking worker get in the ring and throw a fake-looking punch, we told them to get in the ring and to just hit us for real.

One of our fixes was to have the guys go out there and practically kill each other to mask the fact that they had no wrestling skill whatsoever. What this did was make the "strong style" Japanese fans and the smart marks really take notice of our product. Before this, they were not getting this product in America. The reason that fans started tuning in more was because our guys were hitting each other for real *because they didn't know how to work.*

It was perfect timing to offer something new. The same wrestling fans who were getting bored of the big man, powerhouse style started to find their way to us. They were booing Hulk Hogan. They were booing the fact that the same top guys were winning every match in the cartoon wrestling world over in WWF. Fans would turn the channel and boo those guys, too. On the other channel, things were even worse. The number two promotion, WCW, was funded by Ted Turner who had a personal problem with Vince McMahon. Therefore, all Ted was doing at that time was trying to steal their talent and rip off everything the WWF did in an effort to compete with them. Nobody wanted a WWF-lite.

The moment I signed a contract with the ECW, the fans loved me instantly, despite the fact that I was supposed to be a bad guy. The reason

for this was simple: I wasn't just body-slamming guys. I wasn't doing leg drops and holding my hand up to my ear in a tired old schtick. I was giving them something new; something that you didn't see anywhere on American television. They loved my gritty, violent move arsenal packed with a risky, or what they started calling a "suicidal & homicidal" offensive attack.

MY ECW DEBUT

According to my first television storyline with ECW, I was too out of control to even wander around the ring alone. I had to have a handler. I needed a big babysitter that could control me. So, in my early days with the company, they put me with this big buy called 911 who looked like the lovechild of the Big Boss Man and The Undertaker.

My character at this time was supposed to be clinically insane. It was some serious *Silence of the Lambs*-type shit we were trying to pull off. Paul E. figured that this would help explain my suicidal-like arsenal of crazy moves. In my first few matches with the company, I was an uncontrollable madman who was strapped to a gurney. Then, 911 would wheel me out to the ring like a guard at a mental hospital. The fans ate it up. I was chained down, flailing my head back and forth while wearing a Hannibal Lecter-style face mask.





As the “Madman Sabu” character, I would be released from my bonds only a few seconds before it was actually time to wrestle in my matches. Then, I would attack my opponent like a rabid dog.

While this probably looked great to the people in attendance, it was really tough for me to pull off physically. The gimmick intro always killed me before anything even happened in the ring. While trying desperately to free myself by shaking violently and playing the role how it should be played, I was exerting a ton of energy just before wrestling in a highly-aerobic style. Before my introduction was even over, I was already blowing up. I was exhausted before we even locked up.

My use of tables, chairs, and anything else that was around me was totally foreign to America. It was even foreign to Japan the way I did it. Again, I didn’t just swing a chair. Take my “Air Sabu” flying leg drop with a chair under it, for example. I would use the force of my body with the chair under my leg to drive it into an opponent’s body as a weapon. On the off chance that a fan was familiar with the Japanese-style hardcore wrestling that they may have seen on an FMW Onita videotape, I was still doing something a lot different than the usual way most people hit other people with chairs.

MY TRADEMARK TABLES

During the first few months of my time at ECW, the name “Sabu” quickly became synonymous with broken tables. The whole idea was part of my gimmick. If you saw one of my matches, you knew a table was going to come into play somehow.

Life goal #1: Make a conscious effort to destroy at least one table every match.

In the rare event that a table wasn’t broken during the match, I knew I needed to break a table with my own body before the next guys were ready to come out. If that didn’t work, I would grab a camera guy, and do it in a backstage interview.

Pretty much everyone loved it, and almost nobody complained. There was one guy who let it be known that he didn't like my constant use of tables. Early on, I thought Taz was a competitive motherfucker. It seemed like he must have felt that everyone owed him something for his contribution to the promotion. I think he felt that, personally, I used table spots to steal his spotlight. We are totally cool now, but I hated teaming with Taz at the beginning of ECW, and I'll get more into our early relationship shortly.

At this time, Taz was the only guy on the regular roster that didn't like table spots and was very vocal about it. However, there were a number of old-timers who actually came up to me from time to time, to say that I was "destroying the business" due to my in-ring style.

At first, it was only me breaking tables; everyone knew it was my deal. That was my whole gimmick. Afterward though, things changed. The guys I worked with saw the reaction I was getting every time I broke a table. The pop was enormous. Rarely would fans ever see that kind of destruction on any type of television wrestling product, and if a table was broken, it was never the way that I was doing it. Because of the response my gimmick was receiving, it wasn't long before others in the back wanted to use tables in their matches, as well.

The first time I heard about others in ECW using a table was while I was away on an FMW tour. When I came back, I started hearing rumblings that on some shows that I wasn't on, someone in the locker room decided to do a table spot to "give the crowd what they wanted."

"Hey man," one of the Dudleys said. "What you heard was true. While you were gone, Public Enemy was breaking tables left and right. It was almost gimmick infringement."

Now, I know this person was probably saying this just to get my goat. But not being one for that type of thing, I went and asked Johnny Grunge if he was breaking tables at house shows.

"No, man," he said, denying it. "That's your thing."

"It is, but I'm hearing otherwise," I said.

"No, man," he said. "Not me."

"The thing is, if everyone starts doing it, there will be no end. It won't be special."

"I hear you."

After that, I did not care for Public Enemy anymore. For a time, there was heat between me and Rocco Rock for



using the table spot and him saying that he didn't when everyone else said that he did. Yes, I was protective of my gimmick and I went to Paul to try to protect my thing when Public Enemy started breaking tables.

"No, I promise you, they will never break tables," Paul said.

"They already did," I told him.

"Well, they won't anymore, I can assure you."

I knew he was bullshitting me. In fact, when I was not on a show, I have been told that he knew he needed my table breaking gimmick to keep the fans happy, so he would just have other people break tables. Eventually, I had to just deal with it. I had made tables such a part of ECW that it couldn't just be mine anymore.

For a time, people would actually come up to me on a show backstage and ask permission to do table-spots. Guys like Dreamer, the Dudleys, Johnny Grunge, they all did. However, after a while, they stopped asking me.

Eventually, it got back to Paul that I was mad about watering my trademark spots down, and I think he decided to rib me and try to put a nail in my table-coffin altogether. One night, Paul bought thirty tables at some auction somewhere and had everyone on the card and their mothers breaking tables. Raven and Dreamer broke five tables that night! I knew he had to be breaking my balls so I didn't even give him the courtesy. I acted like I didn't care, but I was madder than a son of a bitch.

After that, Brian Lee and Dreamer had, like, twenty tables in their scaffold match. I knew it was going to come to that. Using that many tables was absurd, but I didn't care. I knew the uniqueness of the table was gone.

Originally, if there was one table spot on a show, people would freak out when they saw it. It was crazy in their eyes. After a dozen or so on one show, a fan wasn't going to pop anymore like they did after seeing the same thing ten times. It was overkill and it diminished the response.

Eventually, I just gave up. For the good of the whole, I gave up on the idea that tables were "Sabu's trademark style" and agreed to seeing it becoming "ECW's style" – that is, seeing a table broken in an ECW match regularly, no matter who was in the ring.

I won't mention names, but once the floodgates were open, some of the boys even tried to do my innovative table shit, but just did it really shitty. I

liked to believe that the people could see the difference, but in the end, they were probably just happy to see carnage in any match.

Eventually, breaking a table in ECW became as regular as a headlock in WWF.

SHANE, TERRY & THE ECW WORLD TITLE

Shane Douglas was an excellent hand and an excellent heel. He was perfect for ECW because he could do anything and make anyone look good.

Shane was practically there from the start. He debuted strongly on August 24th, 1993 during ECW's formative years as a villain, beating Don E. Allen & Herve Renesto in a handicap match. Clearly being a great talent that the company needed, and one close enough that he could drive to shows easily from where he lived at the time, Douglas quickly rose to the top of the roster.

As stated before, after winning the ECW Heavyweight title, he became the face of the promotion that ushered in the new Extreme direction. Douglas successfully defended the title against the likes of the uber-hardcore Sandman and showed that he could hold his own.

At *Bloodfest: Part 2*, Douglas retained his title against JT Smith, but then, in a big surprise, he dropped the title to me later that night!

My gimmick was super over with the fans, so much so that Paul felt he had to put the belt on me. (That idea, of course, was one I didn't have a problem with.) Part of my first world title reign was probably due to the fact that he appreciated what I brought to the table. Paul recognized the whole Japan influence that the promotion had under my charge and the table spot thing that I brought to the promotion. I think this was his way of thanking me for helping with the company's success.

Other than my uncle, Terry Funk was a huge part of my development that helped to make my first heavyweight run happen. He helped me with finishes, psychology, and the little nuances that really polished me. The most significant matches during the early part of my ECW career were with him. These would eventually lead on to me dropping the ECW World title to Terry after beating Shane Douglas. Then defeating Terry Funk in a crazy barbed wire match (which I will discuss soon) years later to win it back.

Terry was also in a three-way dance for the ECW World Heavyweight Championship at ECW's *The Night the Line Was Crossed* against Shane

Douglas and me. Now, three ways can often be a clusterfuck, but Terry was an excellent leader and a teacher. He showed me how to go to a one-hour time limit draw and still beat Public Enemy for the ECW World Tag Team Championship with my partner Taz in a double tables match on the same show. (That was a busy night for sure.)

Speaking of Taz . . .

THE TAZMANIAC

Originally, in October 1993, Joe Chetti (brother of Chris Chetti) and Peter Senercia (cousin of the Chetti brothers) debuted in Eastern Championship Wrestling just before its name change. Their tag team, The Tazmaniacs, only lasted a very short time before Joe left on injury. So much like what happened to The British Bulldogs, Peter just kept the tag name for himself. I'm not really sure why he did this, however, because it basically was a lame orange caveman gimmick.

After their team broke up, I had a singles match with the Tazmaniac. For whatever reason, he felt that doing a table spot would make him look weak and didn't want to do it. He argued with me on it big time even though Paul wanted it to happen. I just didn't understand it. He was arguing that a table spot would make him look weak even more so than the fact that his gimmick made him look like fucking Fred Flintstone.



I will say this about him, however: He worked very hard for the promotion and did everything right to help it succeed. He put up the ring. He helped with tickets. All of this did not go unnoticed by the office.

After our match, he was put into another team with Kevin Sullivan and they became the ECW Tag Team Champions. During a second reign as Tag Team Champion with Sullivan, The Tazmaniac even became the Television Champion for one night in March 1994, because of his hard work. However, he was still mostly viewed at by the company as being a tag team wrestler without a partner.

For most of the rest of the year, The Tazmaniac worked matches teaming with different partners. Eventually, he ended up in a new tag team called *The Dangerous Alliance*. Yes, that's right, Tazmaniac went on to hold a tag team title belt once more, but this time with me.

I don't know if we still had heat because of that table spot or not, but he was still competitive with me and we constantly locked horns. I just didn't like having to tag with him.

ECW TV TITLE

At ECW's *November to Remember* on November 13, 1993, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, I pinned Terry Funk in a tag team match to win the ECW TV title. It was me and Road Warrior Hawk versus Terry Funk and King Kong Bundy.

About six months later, Paul Heyman came to me and told me that he wanted me to drop the TV title to JT Smith. I really like JT as a person, but at this point in his wrestling career, he was terrible. I really didn't want to put him over because then it would look like I was getting beat by someone who really sucked. That would mean that I suck even worse.

"Look, Paul," I said. "I don't mind dropping the title at all. I just don't want to lose it to a nutsack like JT Smith."

"Well, who would you drop the belt to?" Paul asked.

"It is not about who I lose it to in this case," I said. "It is more about who I don't want to drop the belt to."

“Okay, so?”

“So, I'll even drop it to Taz if you want me to,” I said, knowing he knew I wasn’t a big Taz fan.

Word got back to JT Smith that he would be getting the belt soon, but he just would not be getting it from me as we had planned. When he found out that I would be dropping the belt to Taz first, JT came up and confronted me in the locker room.

“Listen, Sabu,” he said.

“What’s up?”

“I am disappointed in you,” he said.

My head started spinning. I wasn’t sure how I was going to tell him that I didn’t want to lose it to him because he was so horrible. I took a moment to think about how I was going to choose my words when he cut me off. “Well?”

“Is the reason you do not want me to win the title from you because I am black?”

I shook my head. I couldn't believe what he just asked.

“What?” I said. “Taz is black!”

"Wait. Is he?" JT asked.

So on a show in Philly on March 6, 1994, I dropped the belt to Taz, and he then dropped the title to JT that same night.

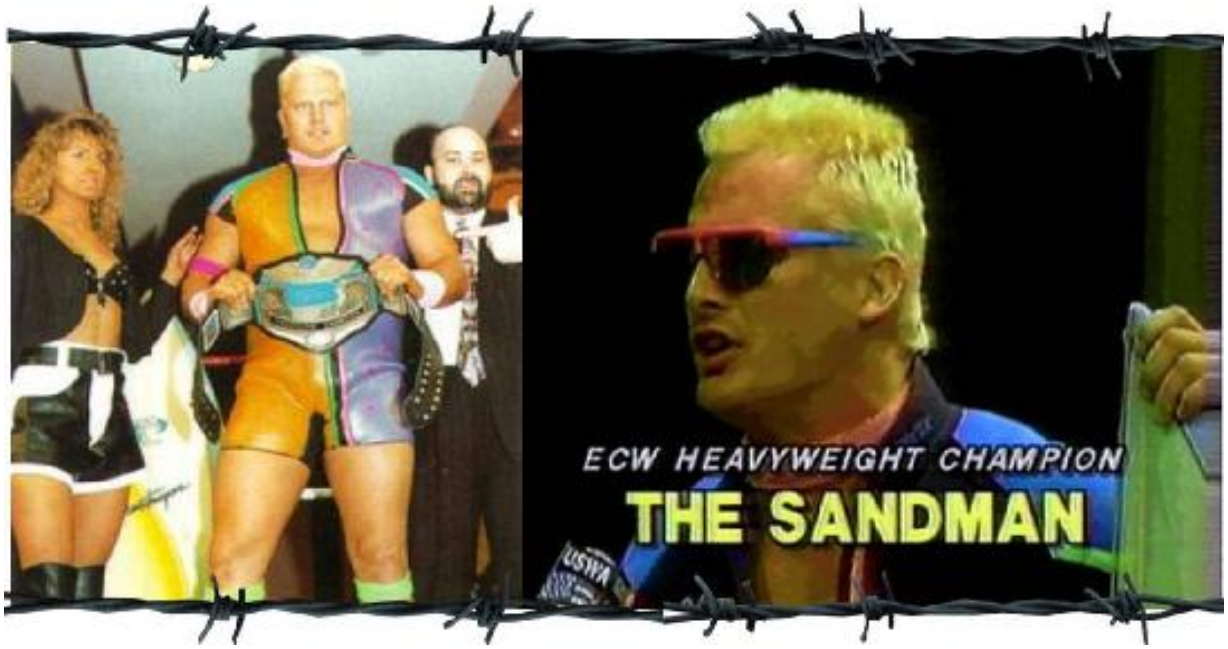
THE SANDMAN

James Fullington was there from the start, and he was always a huge partier. I’m not judging. I can only say this really because I was probably partying right alongside him …*at least I think?* Because of the epic proportions of both of our partying pasts, coming up with some exceptional stories about the wrestler known as The Sandman is exceptionally difficult for me. It’s all kind of a big blur.

He started around 1989 in Philadelphia for what would eventually transform into ECW, a promotion called Tri-State Wrestling Alliance. He was managed by his then real-life wife, Peaches, and his ring name was originally Mr. Sandman. The interesting thing about this was the sand was

for beaches, not passing out and going to sleep. His first gimmick was totally a surfer dude wearing Oakleys, a Body Glove wetsuit, and an Ocean Pacific pink headband, toting a full-sized surfboard to the ring.

Just like Rob and myself, Mr. Sandman had some of his early matches in Memphis around ’91 and ’92, and while the beachcomber gimmick worked there — it really just wasn’t him.



In April of ’92, he was back in Philly for Eastern Championship Wrestling as a fan favorite. On November 16, 1992, he won his first ECW Championship from an even more famous beach bum in the likes of Don Muraco, losing it back to him in April of the next year.

In 1994, ECW owner Tod Gordon took over and asked Sandman to drop the surf gimmick and act more like himself. The idea was that James Fullington was such a larger-than-life character in real life that he didn’t need a put-on gimmick. Around then, he dropped the “Mister” and became just The Sandman. He worked some with Tommy Cairo, and another Tommy, a rookie named Tommy Dreamer. He eventually traded in his real wife Peaches for Kevin Sullivan’s real-life wife, Woman, to become his valet. (Woman would eventually trade Kevin Sullivan in for Chris Benoit to become his wife, but that’s another story altogether.)

Sandman eventually adopted the idea to be truthful and live the gimmick in the ring, which wasn't really a gimmick at all. I guess what I am trying to say is, like a fine artist, he often turned to outside sources for inspiration, that is, he often wrestled drunk as hell.

When asked about working with Sandman who was almost always classified as a wrestler who wrestled drunk, I have to admit, I was skeptical about getting in the ring with him in the early days knowing he was shitfaced. But after a while, I got used to it, and I think he was actually better to work with drunk than sober. He wouldn't try and throw as much stupid shit in that he had overt-thought and would listen more for your lead. Being able to listen and cooperative is a huge part of wrestling.

Sandman became a huge part of the ECW family.

BROKEN NECK

Early on, there was one match that really put me over. It put me on the map. It really secured my reputation as being insane, and so much so that I didn't even care about my own well-being. In fact, this bout is what would lead Paul E. to call me "The Suicidal, Homicidal, Genocidal, Human Highlight Reel."

I absolutely hate that name by the way.

In a death match against the then "Canadian Crippler" Chris Benoit at the 1994 November to Remember, I broke my neck (for the first time) in the company.

I was actually the one who pushed Paul E. to bring Chris Benoit to ECW in the first place. See, when I was over in Japan, I worked with him a bunch, and I knew his hard-hitting style would be perfect for the bloodthirsty fans in Philadelphia. So, one night while talking to him overseas, Benoit asked if I could help get more work in the US, so I made the call. I mean, I was trying to help the guy out, but even more selfishly, I really wanted to wrestle Chris on TV in the States. I knew it would mean money for both of us.

The first time I broke my neck, Benoit threw me thinking I was going to take a flapjack-type bump, but on my end, there was a misread. I thought I

was supposed to be taking a back body drop bump instead, so the very last second, I tried to turn around mid-air so I could land in the position I was supposed to end up in, *but that isn't what happened.*

Not getting around all the way, I twisted my body funny and ended landed right on my fucking head.

It by no means was someone being sloppy. It was miscommunication. Chris threw me in the air with one move in mind, and I thought it was something else. I tried to right myself, but I just couldn't do it and landed flat on the top of my head.

God! What the fuck was that?!

There was sharp pain. I tried to turn my head slightly. I could hear a crunchiness as I moved and knew it wasn't good.

My chest buckled inward as I hit the mat with all of my weight on the top of my head. My spine impacted. My neck was legitimately broken. However, along with the collective groan from the crowd, I heard my uncle like a drill sergeant in my head.

The show must go on.

I rolled out of the ring. Paul was acting as my manager, and 911 was my handler. They knew I was hurt.

I wanted to do what a real professional did. I was taught you would do whatever had to be done to make it to the finish that the promoter wanted. I wanted to go into "pro-mode" and keep on wrestling to get to the finish, but the two guys around me wouldn't let me.

Some of you may have seen the match on WWF's SummerSlam, Aug 3, 1997, where Owen Hart reversed Steve Austin into a sitting piledriver. Austin's neck was too low in position and when Hart went executed the move, he spiked Stone Cold's down into the mat headfirst and the maneuver broke his neck. Austin could barely move, as he was legit temporarily paralyzed. The injury was a huge problem, but some will agree that to the wrestlers in the ring the storyline problem seemed to trump the injury. Austin had to figure out how to pin Owen even though he couldn't move. What ended up happening was that Owen had to stall to allow a slow-moving Austin to crawl over to Hart and roll him up for the pin. This was probably the worst roll up ever, but you have to give it up for their professionalism to make the finish happen.

The show must go on.

I am not sure I can describe this will to continue to someone who is not a professional wrestler. When you are out in the ring, you give it your all. Not even a broken neck was going to stop me that night (or any night) from giving the fans the performance they wanted and were supposed to get if it weren't for my boss being right there.

"I can finish," I said, but I guess it was clear that I could not.

"No," Paul said. "You stay here."

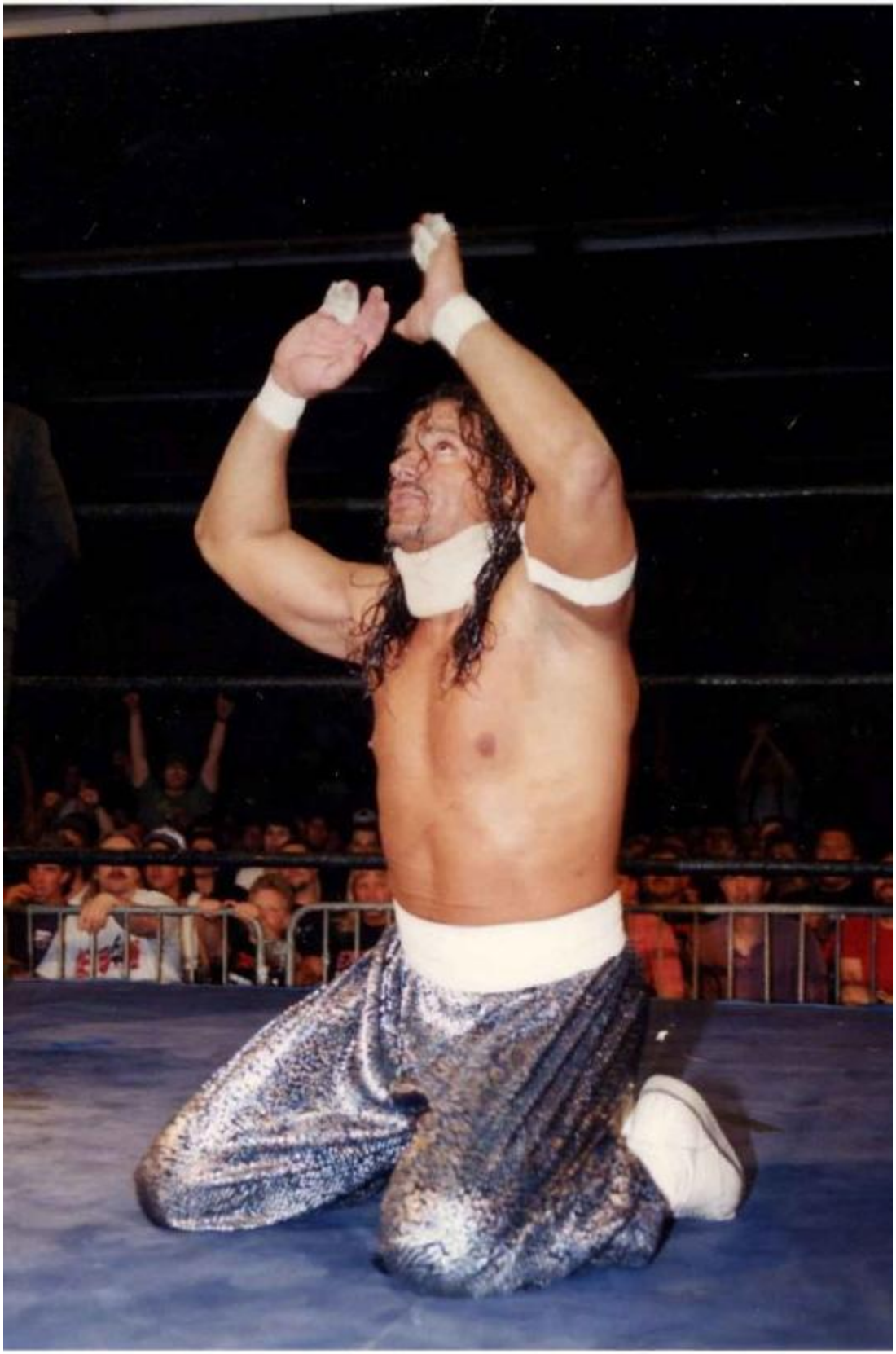
I slept in a neck brace. My career was continuing to skyrocket, and I couldn't take time off. Usually, the way it works in wrestling is when you take time off, someone else comes along and takes your spot. I couldn't afford to let that happen at that time. About two weeks after my injury, I was up and moving and ready to get back in the ring.

To stay in the spotlight, I just asked Paul E. to be booked in more tag matches for a bit until I was up to higher profile singles bouts. So, my next match after the injury was with my tag team partner Tazmaniac against the Malenko Brothers, Dean, and Joe.

In a tag match, I could protect myself a little. I could go in and do some offense, then maybe tag Taz back in to take some of the heat that I physically couldn't. It worked. I was later told by my physician that I was extremely lucky. Had I taken the wrong move in that tag match and landed on my head or neck area just right, and I probably would've been paralyzed for the rest of my life.

Broken neck or not, the ECW ball continued to roll, and so did my own.

I won ECW TV & Tag Team belts, then I even beat the legendary Terry Funk for the Heavyweight title. That feather in my cap meant I had held all the titles that ECW offered.



FINISHING SCHOOL

Around this time, a few guys in the back were trying to break in a new guy by the name of Pablo Marquez. They had found him at an independent and thought because of his impersonation of me that maybe he would be a good fit. I didn't really know what he was doing. I mean, I guess it was sort of like a knock-off Sabu, but he didn't really try to be me exactly, at least I didn't think that was the case. What I did know was that he wasn't very good at the time.

"Honestly, man, I didn't even belong there," Pablo said to us in an interview for this book. "I mean, I was green, green, green! There were so many more qualified people, but somehow, I got the spot and realize just how lucky I was for having that opportunity today."

Everyone is new at some point and needs a break. Some say that Pablo may have been stealing my stuff, but I didn't look at it that way at all. He wasn't ripping me off, he said I was his idol. I took that as a sign of respect. He had a good attitude, so I decided to try to help him however I could.

I ended up bringing him up to my place during my time off and training him some more myself. We became very good friends.

"Sabu taught me so much, and I am so thankful for everything he did for me. I only have good memories of him. He was the very best," Pablo says today.

When Pablo first came to my house to practice for a week, I think he thought he was just going to do moonsaults. He got in the ring and started doing all this acrobatic shit. I shifted gears and immediately turned into my uncle, a version of many years before.

"A moonsault is not wrestling, it's show business."

After that, I started from square one. I sat and showed him headlocks and all the basics again. He listened and learned and became much better than he was. Everyone saw an improvement.

After that, a lot of guys related to ECW came to hang out at my place. I never charged them anything though. Finishing School was back to basics.

We would take a guy who claimed to be “trained” and show him why his training had failed.

It was about giving back to my love of the sport. I had quite a little class for a while going. I had some students who were friends of various wrestlers in the promotion who they thought showed potential. We had guys from Germany, Austria, and England. No names. I didn’t charge them. The deal was if they helped me with some independent shows, I would help them back meaning… “You drive my car while I sleep, and I will train you.”

I remember for a time I was doing some spots with Pat Tanaka so we would do a bunch of shows together. We had had a different driver it seemed for every show driving my big mobile home camper all over the place and eventually end the trip back over to Philly for ECW. I would then sometimes get them booked in the undercard. A lot of times, they would just be tackling dummies for Tanaka or myself and not really amount to anything, but at least we got them some real ring time.

"El Puerto Riqueño" Pablo Marquez aka "Ubas" (LEFT) as seen here with Mikey Whipwreck (RIGHT) before his run in the WWE as Babu.





BLUE MEANIE on NWA SABU

I’ve been asked to talk about NWA: Sabu, but first I want to talk about the man behind it. Sabu is without a doubt, one of the most influential and innovative professional wrestlers ever. In the world of professional wrestling, you can't, unfortunately, put a patent on moves or move sets. However, if you could, Sabu would be a gazillionaire!

I love Sabu. I first came to appreciate him as a fan, but it was even better when I eventually got to know Sabu from working with him. That is when I really grew to love the man.

The first time I came across him as a fan, he was wrestling at a few Dennis Coralluzzo events. I remember sitting there in the audience, and then seeing something crazy that he did. He made my eyes bug right out of my head. I was simply beside myself watching him perform.

Seeing Sabu in the ring for the first time is hard to describe in words. I can only maybe relate that feeling to the way that I might have reacted to hearing an exceptional ground-breaking piece of music for the first time. One example of this would be the first time I heard Eddie Van Halen's guitar on his solo in “Eruption”... Another example was the first time I heard Slash’s opening riff for “Sweet Child of Mine." Hearing Eddie Van Halen, hearing Slash, and seeing Sabu were all similar “*what-the-hell-was-that”* type moments.

When I moved to Lima, Ohio to train at Al Snow's old “Bodyslammers Pro Wrestling School,” I finally got to meet Sabu. Sabu and Al were in the middle of a program that was, at the time, one of the hottest feuds in the business (and one of the most underrated feuds when you think of some of Sabu's top rivalries.) Getting to see those matches was incredible. At the time, I really couldn’t believe what was happening there in the ring. If only it had been broadcasted to a larger audience. It looked like a real-life video game!

During my time training there in Ohio, Al would book Sabu on all of his shows that took place right at our school, as a venue. We all watched him in awe, and afterward, I would often ask him some questions about what I saw him do in the ring back in the locker room. It was a real treat to be able to learn from him when he was around.

Eventually, stealing a page out of his Uncle’s book, Sabu decided to try his hand at promoting. He started by running his own shows later on in Michigan under the NWA banner. Behind-the-scenes, the boys used to call these shows “NWA Sabu.” For these shows, Sabu was cool and hooked a bunch of us up. He enlisted most of Al Snow's students at one time or another to wrestle on his undercard and to get some experience wrestling in front of an audience. This is where I made my debut. I started out as Brian Rollins.

Another one of Sabu's goals was to also bring in a lot of new talent that hadn't worked yet in the Detroit area wrestling promotions. This way, his fans would get to see fresh new faces that they knew very little about. In wrestling, “new” also always meant “exciting.” These shows were a blessing to me in that it was more opportunity to work, to learn, and to be seen. The exposure was great because Sabu's shows were getting a lot of coverage due to his notoriety, and he let me along for the ride.

Also along the way, the NWA Sabu shows were overlapping his tenure at ECW. Therefore, Sabu was able to tap their talent for his own shows. He started to bring in ECW talents like Taz, Tommy Dreamer, and even Paul Heyman from time to time. Working on these particular shows was my big break. Because Sabu did this, I was able to create a sense of familiarity between myself and some of the ECW crew. This is why I was eventually brought over to ECW by Raven and Stevie Richards to work with them.

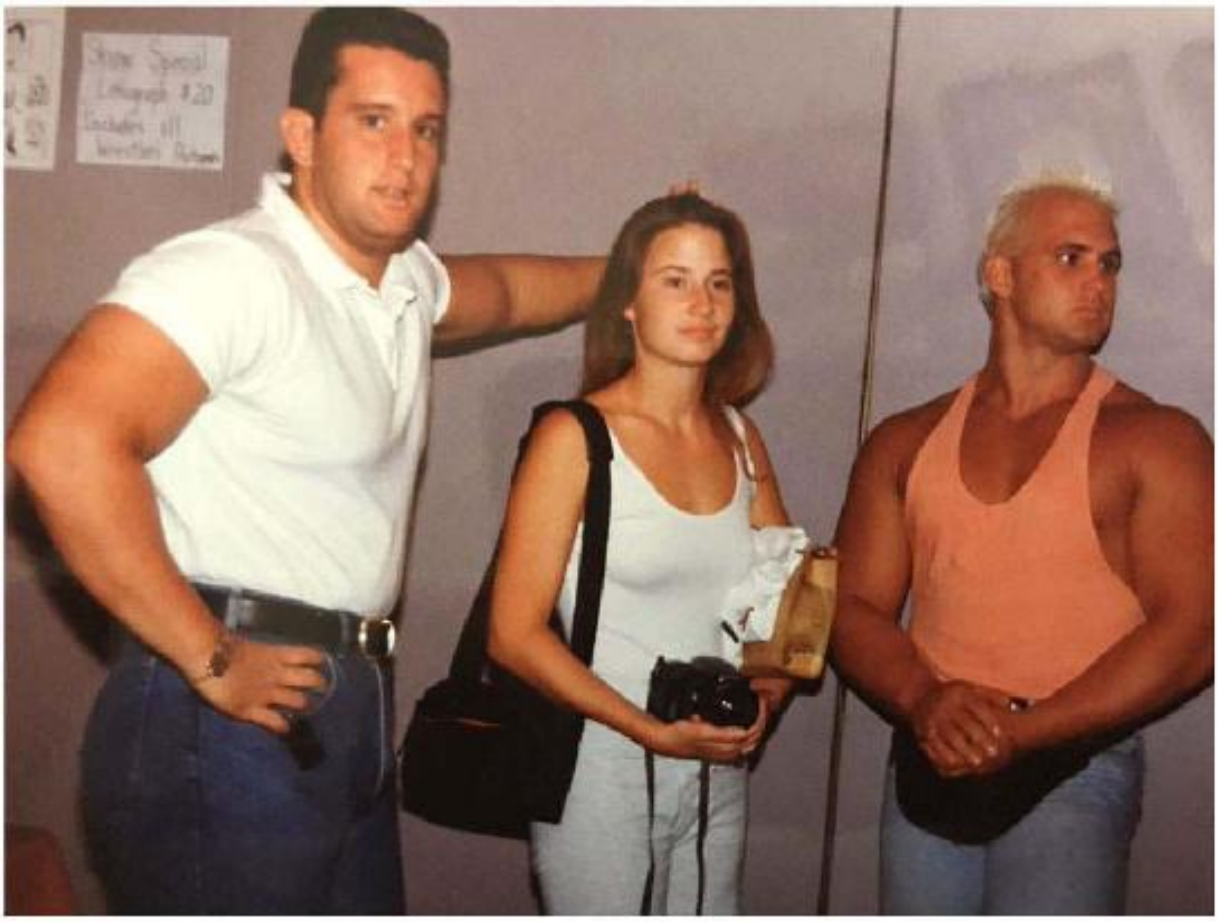
But again this isn't about me and my time with NWA Sabu. This is about the guy who helped put me on the map there. My story is about just one of the many wrestlers who benefited from the contributions Sabu made to professional wrestling. Whether Sabu was pulling someone aside after a match and giving them a critique, or actually taking someone under their wing and mentoring them – he was always there to help the guys coming up.

As you have already read, one example of Sabu’s generosity was evident in the case of Louie Spicolli. Louie was fired by a Japanese promotion because of a practical joke that Sabu pulled that ended up backfiring on Louie. However, what you do not know is that Sabu felt so bad about what happened that he actually paid Louie to wrestle in ECW. That’s right, Sabu was so honorable that he booked Louie out of his own pay as a way to get him to work and make right out of a wrong situation.

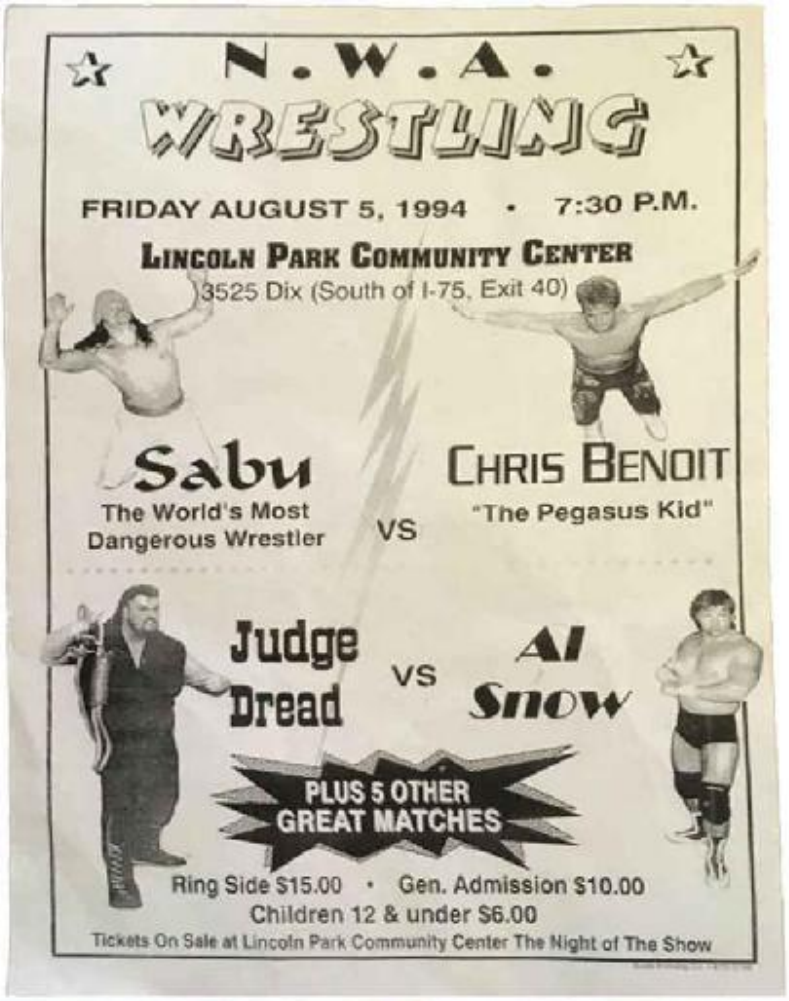
That's just the type of guy Sabu is. That's what I love Sabu. That's why I admire Sabu. That's why I say to Sabu, “THANK YOU” for your contributions and physical sacrifice.

Your uncle, The Almighty Sheik, would be proud.

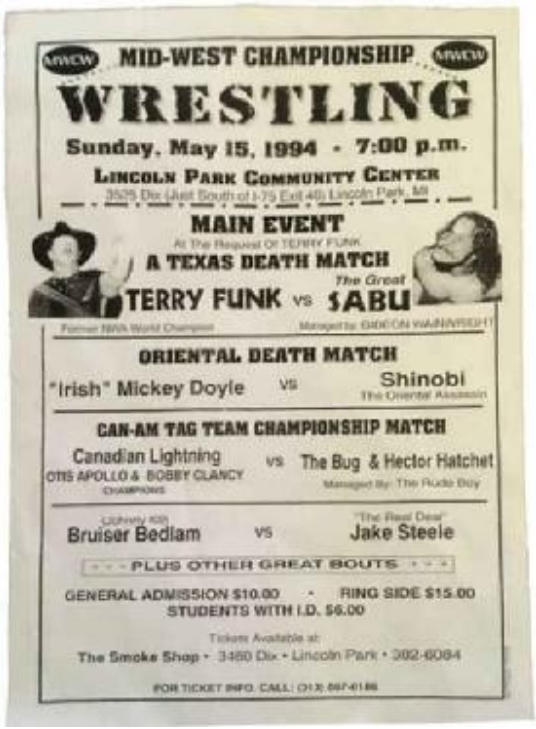
-THE BLUE MEANIE



As you read above from the kind words of The Blue Meanie, the ECW roster was just like a family, always together and always looking out for each other from the start. Here is a very early shot of a clean-shaven Tommy Dreamer, Sunny, & Chris Candido.


N.W.A.
WRESTLING
FRIDAY AUGUST 5, 1994 • 7:30 P.M.
LINCOLN PARK COMMUNITY CENTER
3525 Dix (South of I-75, Exit 40)
Sabu
The World's Most Dangerous Wrestler
VS
CHRIS BENOIT
"The Pegasus Kid"
Judge Dread
VS
Al Snow
PLUS 5 OTHER GREAT MATCHES
Ring Side $15.00 • Gen. Admission $10.00
Children 12 & under $6.00
Tickets On Sale at Lincoln Park Community Center The Night of The Show


N.W.A.
WRESTLING
FRIDAY AUGUST 19, 1994 • 7:30 P.M.
LINCOLN PARK COMMUNITY CENTER
3525 Dix (South of I-75, Exit 40)
For The World Independent Championship
Sabu
The Worlds Most Dangerous Wrestler
Sabu Will Be Legal To The Ring By His Manager
VS
THE TAZMANIAC
Champion
Challenger
Paul E. Dangerously
Judge Dread VS Al Snow
PLUS 5 OTHER GREAT MATCHES
Ring Side $15.00 • Gen. Admission $10.00
Children 12 & under $6.00
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MWCW
MID-WEST CHAMPIONSHIP
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WRESTLING
Sunday, May 15, 1994 • 7:00 p.m.
LINCOLN PARK COMMUNITY CENTER
3525 Dix (Just South of I-75 Exit 40) Lincoln Park, MI
MAIN EVENT
At The Request Of TERRY FUNK
A TEXAS DEATH MATCH
TERRY FUNK VS The Great SABU
ORIENTAL DEATH MATCH
"Irish" Mickey Doyle VS Shinobi
The Oriental Assassin
CAN-AM TAG TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH
Canadian Lightning
OTIS APOLLO & BOBBY CLANCY
CHAMPIONS
VS
The Bug & Hector Hatchet
Managed By: The Rude Boy
Lightning Kid
Bruiser Bedlam
VS
"The Real Deal"
Jake Steele
PLUS OTHER GREAT BOUTS
GENERAL ADMISSION $10.00 • RING SIDE $15.00
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CHAPTER 8 – SELF-MEDICATION

This section may seem odd to some at first. As you have read, I have always been pretty skeptical about paying anyone for medication, or for healing purposes anyhow. While avoiding hospitals at all costs was not necessarily a rule I learned to follow from The Sheik, he often avoided them himself. The Sheik never told me in so many words, “Terry, you should never go to a hospital.” However, looking back at how he rolled, I think I inherit this trait from him.

My uncle hated hospitals. He stayed away from them to save time, save money, and to save himself from hassle. All that. Somewhere along the line, I started doing the same. It wasn’t long before I also put into practice my own golden rule that you should always “Self-Medicate at all costs.”

When my writer Kenny Casanova was careful and skirting around the issue about my own drug-use for this book, he said something like, “Hey, man. Do you want to talk about some of the, um, after-parties? Like, what would happen after shows, partying and all?”

“You mean the drugs?” I asked, cutting right to the point. “Everybody knows that I'm a drug addict, so why not put it in the book?”

So, between both self-medication from injuries and recreational use, yes, I’ve had my share. So how did it start?

Just to give you a little bit of an idea of where my drug abuse came from, it all really started soon after my match with Chris Benoit where he broke my neck. Chris and I didn't like each other all that much, like we didn’t hang out or travel together, but we didn't hate each other. In fact, I was the reason he was in ECW. As I said, he wanted more matches in America, and I vouched for him to make it happen.

So, when he broke my neck, I knew what he did was an accident. He didn't at all want that to happen.

As to why it happened, I just think he was kind of indifferent and didn't care all that much about not stiffing me a little, laying it in snug. That’s why he looked so crisp. I think overall he figured I could take it. Indifference to risk in making the wrestling looking good really is the definition of what happened here. So after it happened, I lost feeling in my hands. Regardless of my hatred of hospitals, they rushed me to the hospital and put me under.

Chris Benoit came and hung out in my room pretty much the whole time I was there recovering. I do remember coming out of unconsciousness at one point and seeing him there. He was very apologetic and even cried. He stayed there until I got released.

I guess I was pretty crazy. I started to wrestle again on shows for ECW in a very short time after that, with only maybe a few weeks of healing under my belt. This was certainly against the doctor's orders, but since when did I care about doctors?

I had a bunch of good paying matches in Japan that I needed to do, so I left for my last FMW tour with my head wrapped up in foam. Over in Japan, I actually wrestled my first match back wearing a neck brace. In FMW, they didn't seem to care about the neck brace, they thought it made me look tough. However, once I jumped over to New Japan Pro Wrestling, I saw a different interpretation of my brace. I remember the referee, Tiger Hattori, saying, “We don't want you to wear the brace because it looks like you are hurt.”

“But I am hurt,” I replied.

I ended up working in New Japan without the neck brace on, even though the pain was crazy. During a match, I would get the adrenaline going and not feel it so badly, but at night, I would have to prop up pillows, and I could never really get comfortable.

After one night of tossing and turning with practically no sleep, I realized that I needed to handle this one differently. That is when I started finally thinking about doing something I never did — look for medication.

I took the pills the doctor gave me. I got a little sleep but didn’t really notice all that much of a difference. I wrestled a little safer, but basically, I probably was just breaking my neck over and over again every match. Any healing that may have happened was getting undone every time I stepped into the ring.

My condition lasted the good part of a year. My neck was in constant pain.

Back in the States, it was Benoit who gave me my first few real pills outside of a prescription. I took them and again nothing much happened. A little bit of the daily pain went away and they did make it noticeably easier to work. There was no sort of high or buzz or anything of the sort, though. They just eased the aches and took away the edge.

Benoit asked me how they worked. I told him “good,” and he got me some more. When I got to working with Benoit again, I never gave him a receipt for that broken neck. He tried to help. Yes, I would treat him like an asshole in the locker room. Yes, I was not very nice to him. However, I would never intentionally blindside somebody during a match physically. That was not my style, and he tried to help.

I took almost zero time off from ECW. After working with a neck brace for some time and wrestling with a broken neck, I figured I was unstoppable. If a broken neck didn’t stop me in the ring, why should anything else?

Then, right after the neck, I broke my jaw.

JAWBREAKER

When this life-changing injury occurred, I think I was in Boston. It was me and RVD versus Tommy Dreamer and one of the very best hands in the business, *The Sandman.*

After some always-impressive wrestling from The Sandman that could have put great ring technicians like Muta or Ricky Steamboat to shame, I knew I had to get the crowd into the moment. This was especially so because I am pretty sure The Sandman was probably only one cocktail away from unconsciousness. We, of course, had been working a pretty weapon-heavy match. The ring looked like Fred Sanford’s junkyard. There was a rubber tire, a Nintendo console, a breadbox, a lamp, a snowshoe, and of course a broken table. After the match, if we could have flipped over the table and put it back together, we could put all the shit on it and had a pretty good garage sale.

For a hardcore match, I suppose it was all right. ECW fans were pretty bloodthirsty and liked anything that looked painful. On the flipside of things, however, for a wrestling fan who liked actual wrestling, this match was quickly becoming the shits.

After hitting Sandman with everything but the kitchen sink (then actually hitting him with an actual kitchen sink,) he finally fell hard. So, he was

down, face-first on the mat, very much how he often looked on the locker room floor as a result of countless beverages after any given show.

Being the hero that I am, I got to my feet and decided to try to save the day. I climbed the first rope set to do one of my trademark triple-jump moonsaults. 1-2-3. I nailed it. However, that wasn't the only thing I nailed.

As I came down out of the sky ready to land on my opponent, the leg of that broken table came up fast. Before I hit the mat, it hit me square right under my chin. I never saw it coming.

SMASH!

I actually saw the leg for a split second before it hit me when it was only about three or four inches from my face. It was just a blur, just like a spike coming at me in the lower corner of my eye. I think my brain registered it as a threat. It was targeted to hit me in the eye, and somehow, in the middle of a fucking moonsault, I had enough time to jerk my face away just enough so that I didn't skewer a cornea.

Both rows of my teeth slammed together hard. I had dagged an enormous hole into my lower inside lip. That miscalculation took me out. It was pretty bad, and the pain was horrible. It was almost like getting shot all over again.

I've broken about thirty or forty bones in my life. An x-ray of my skeleton would probably look like a fucking human jigsaw puzzle. I've broken my neck. I've broken my arm. I've broken both wrists. I've broken both of my hands. I've broken I think all my fingers I think at some point or another, and at least three or four of my toes. I broke my ankle and my foot. I've broke my nose, and I think I even broke both my balls and cock once. But shattering my jaw was by far the most painful bone-breaking shit I have ever endured.

I was on the mat with my mouth full of dark blood. When I came to, I felt like somebody was standing on my face, mashing it down with their boot. I tried to swallow. Something wasn't quite right. I knew it was definitely more than a flesh wound.

I went to bite down and realized that my teeth didn't line up. It was like a shower door off the track. I moved my tongue around to take inventory. One row of my back molars was facing inward toward my lower gums. The pain was excruciating. If you have never experienced it, there are no words. It was instantly incomparable. The only thing I can think of is, take a hammer to the side of a vase; that is what it felt like.

When I got up, the ECW fans gave me a standing ovation. I saved that match from stinking up the place and created a moment, all right. Yes, I was a hero, but not for wrestling. I unwillingly saved the match by appealing to the bloodthirsty bastards by sacrificing my ability to chew.

After I got up, I walked back to the curtain. I was holding my jaw in place, but with every step, I felt it move. It was like marbles. There were pieces of bone and jaw moving around in there. I almost passed out. It was broken in different pieces on one side.

It hurt so much that weird self-preservation numbness kicked in and then it didn't hurt anymore. I was not a stranger to that numbness. He had been a good friend to me a number of times in the past.

I grabbed a handful of ice out of a beer cooler and took a blood shower. Once the swelling was down and after I spat out as much blood as I possibly could without needing a transfusion, I took to the mirror.

I turned my lower lip inside out and saw the jagged line where my teeth went through the puffy flesh. Rob came by just in time to see me Supergluing the gash closed in my mouth.

“Ugggh. Gnarly,” he said. “And you’re still here? I figured you would have left.”

I took some toilet paper and draped it across the top of my head ear to ear. RVD watched in awe and shook his head as proceeded to tape my jaw closed. After some frustration, he came over and helped.

“Leave enough room so I can get a straw in there for protein drinks,” I said to my “Whole F’N Nurse.”

At this point, RVD knew the deal. We had been up and down the road together. He had seen it all. Nothing bothered him anymore when it came to me. He made good and sure to keep the hair out of the tape. My hair was part of the money.

“Good thinking with the toilet paper,” he said, wrapping a layer around my chin. “Nice forethought.”

In a voice that sounded like Rocky after a championship fight, I asked a medic how long I should wait before wrestling again.

“I think the bare minimum on a jaw injury would be like six weeks. At that point, your bones are probably healed up enough to where it could withstand getting hit again, at least a little.”

“How do you feel?” Heyman asked me as I made my way to the door, obviously wondering how long one of his key players was going to be out on injury.

“I’ll be here tomorrow.”

“*You are a sick fuck,”* he said smiling. “But sounds good to me.”

I probably I severed a nerve in my jaw, so my whole chin and all my teeth are always slightly numb, even now. I really don't have too much feeling in there anymore, which sucked but also was a good thing. It allowed me not to feel as much pain throughout the healing process the next time it happened.

So, a few months later, after most of it had healed on its own, I came down hard on a guardrail in a match. After the match I knew something wasn't right, I couldn't bite down well. Even closing my mouth after a sip of water bothered me and I had to do something that went against my normal rules about health, I decided to go to the hospital to get it professionally fixed.

When I got there, the oral surgeon knew right away it was broken, but insisted on an x-ray, anyhow.

“This is exactly why I never go to the hospital,” I said.


DUDLEY
BOYZ

He explained to me that if he was going to reset it, he had to see what he was dealing with, so I agreed.

When he came back with the x-rays, he put the pictures up on a lightbox frame built into the wall. You could clearly see that the jaw was dislocated, but you could also see a bunch of black stuff up around the upper level of my mouth.

“It looks like there is something in there still,” he said. “Did you remove any table parts when you were playing doctor the first time it broke?”

“I don’t think so,” I said. “It was the leg, not wood.”

He then started prodding around the roof of my mouth with a stick, and then some kind of metal poker thing. Then, we finally figured out it was not a piece of the table or anything from the match. The x-rays had actually detected bullet shards, deeply embedded shrapnel, from being shot in the face as a kid.

With a needle and thread, he stitched all the pieces of my jaw back together. After the oral surgeon did everything he could, he grabbed a little piece of paper and wrote me a prescription for Vicodin. Just like the other pills Benoit gave me when I broke my neck, the new pills didn't really seem to do a whole lot for me either.

“How many Milligrams,” one of the boys asked when I showed up back in the ECW locker room a few days later.

“Shit, I don’t know,” I said, never being one for pills.

“Do you get a buzz when you take them?”

“No. Off pills?” I asked, never hearing that before.

Axl Rotten looked at the bottle and said they were actually pretty weak. He suggested I take two instead of one.

That night, my jaw was still a mess. I took Dr. Rotten’s new recommended allocation and they still really didn't help.

The next day, the boys asked me in the locker room how my jaw was, and since two pills really didn't seem to do very much I said, “Not very well.”

“Why don't you try two and a half?” Axl asked.

That was the magic number.

You wouldn’t think that half a pill would matter so much. However, after I tried that particular specific dose of pills, I never stopped taking them. I

started taking two and a half anytime they started to wear off and pain was never an issue. It really was fucking magical.

I was instantly hooked.

Now, you have to remember, that out of a lot of the wrestlers out there, I had a very brutal wrestling style. This meant that I would often end up working matches under crazy conditions. My arm might hurt, and leg muscle might be pulled, I might have broken fingers, my neck didn't feel quite right, and sometimes my knee would pop. You could take three or four of these symptoms and say that was the norm for me to experience any time during a number of my matches. So pills became my best friend and a great tag team partner to have for any wrestling match.

Painkillers really had no effect on my state of mind. It was not like taking something that would affect your ability to wrestle in the ring before a match like a twelve-pack was to The Sandman. Now, don't get me wrong, there were a number of occasions where I would have taken Somas early in the afternoon and perhaps would still be feeling the effect of that shit come bell time. However, I would never intentionally take any crazy drugs right before a match that could put my opponent into danger. Never.

My manager Fonzie knew the deal. Whenever we were out of inventory, he would say, "Hey Sabu, daddy. I guess we’re working without a net tonight.” That was code for “there are no painkillers left and I couldn’t find any anywhere.” That would always be a sad day. I was very sad to not have any of my little partners around.

It eventually became my opinion that matches “without nets” really sucked. I began to understand why the wrestlers in Japan would always fill their mouths and say, “I’m taking a tiger bomb in the match tonight, so I also have to take a few of these.”

A lot of people do not know this, but I would always get really nervous before a big match. In fact, I would get really nervous even before small matches.

Roles had reversed a little by this time. Remember when I mentioned I wanted to pick Adrian Adonis’ mind on that early Canadian tour that never happened? Quite often, green guys wanted me to watch their matches so I could give them some advice. Although I always tried, my nerves made it a very tall task for me to sit still and focus during a show long enough to watch a match.

I could almost never sit down before my own matches. I was always pacing back and forth and pretty much bouncing off the walls, anxious for my turn in the ring. My brain was always throwing all the possibilities around, and it was tough for me to just chill after bell time.

I can’t lie. There were a few times where I had to tell a guy that I saw his match and that it was very good when I actually hadn't seen - because I had been running around the locker room just to kill my nerves.

Take that nervousness, add pills to the mix, and then add some acrobatic flips during a match. You are going to have an upset stomach from time to time. This recipe also led to an occasional pre-match or post-match puke, and occasionally mid-match during! (More on the puking later.)

DOOR TO DOOR

The ECW schedule typically ran the arena in Philly every three weeks on Saturday nights for TV tapings and/or home video. Every show had a title. Like when I wrestled RVD in July 1996, it was called "A Matter of Respect." Then three weeks later, the show was called "The Doctor is in" when Steve Williams made an ECW appearance. If we were on tour, those shows revolved around the arena dates.

Drug abuse stories in the ECW locker room were very real. After many of the shows on the road, we’d go out and get something to eat and maybe drink some alcohol. There were never any real crazy Hollywood-like parties with all the boys meeting somewhere for an after show in, like, a big, fancy event or anything. Most of the shows would happen and then you would just go back to the hotel room.

However, the action didn’t stop at the arena. There was quite a lot of action after the gig with the little individual clique parties going on in a lot of the guys' hotel rooms.

See, most of the guys had their own specialty-demons. Usually, one guy would really like only one drug, while another guy would really stick to another. Like, usually the pill-poppers would hang out with the other pill-poppers, or the potheads would hang out with the other potheads, and so on.

As for me, I celebrated diversity at these parties; I liked a little bit of everything. I didn't just pop a couple of pills, I popped in and out of all the rooms.

After a show, I remember once getting off of the elevator and looking down the hallway. All the boys were there with their hotel doors open a crack. That was an open invite for each of us to stop in, see what was going on and see what they were sharing.

On this fine evening, I ducked my head in the first door. There, I saw some pretty tame wrestlers, green guys, sitting around and smoking cigarettes. They offered me a smoke. Maybe a cigar. I hung out with them a second, shook their hands and rushed out of there.

Rookies.

Hearing some noise a few doors down, I made my way towards the laughter.

"Hello," I said peeking in.

A few heads looked up. Terry Funk was in there and they were eating a pizza.

"What's up, Sabu?" the hardcore legend asked. "Come on in and have a drink," he said.

I looked around the room. Cactus Jack was in there trying to figure out how to preserve some slices for the road in a greasy paper bag. A few of the other old-timers, like Tracy Smothers, were digging through a big cooler for the last couple beers. I went in for a bit and enjoyed a few. They were talking about the good ole' days and were pretty cool to hang with. After maybe fifteen minutes or so of reminiscing, they ran out of drinks. I wanted something harder than Budweiser, anyhow, so I was ready to go.

"Well, no more beer? I think I am going to go turn in," I lied. They laughed. I shook their hands walked out. Journeying down to the next room on my quest for liquor, I knew what I wanted. It was preferably whiskey or maybe some vodka from Sunny. Something like that.

The next door down or so was Rob Van Dam's place, I think, in room 420. Now, he didn't have anything good to drink, but he did have some good herbal tea without the tea if you know what I'm saying. After smoking some intense wonder joints with "The Whole Fuckin' Show," and laughing up a storm, I got the munchies and that made me even more thirsty. I think I rudely wandered out his door without saying goodbye, thinking about going

back to Funk’s room and trying to pry the last slice of pizza out of Cactus Jack’s grubby hand. Before doing so, though, I got distracted. My ADD kicked in and I crossed the hall to one of the Japanese guy’s rooms.

“Sabu, look,” he said, trying to be a good host.

It didn’t take long before my man was opening something that looked like a plastic bag full of Skittles. There, under the rainbow, I found a bunch of cool pills from the Land of the Rising Sun. I didn’t know what they all were, but after taking a good handful, I had to shit. After dropping some timber off, I realized I was super dehydrated. I had a massive case of cottonmouth. I started thinking about that vodka again to wash them down again, so I bowed and headed out.

A couple doors down, I found Molly (and I don’t mean Holly.) I shook some hands, took a hit, and then said my goodbyes. “Thanks, but I gotta go, now. Man, am I fucking thirsty,” I said.

A couple after that and still craving a drink, I found myself in the Coke room, but, as you can imagine, that didn’t quench my thirst either because it was the kind of Coke that only came in powder form.

As you can probably guess, by this point, I was fucked up. They had everything you could imagine down that hall. It was a buffet of narcotics.

Having one particular monkey on my back for me probably would have been best, but because I was into a little bit of all of it, I tried pretty much all of it. In less than an hour of doing the rounds, I think I blacked out. When I woke up, I found myself in yet another room: The Sandman’s. Just like his name, he always had stuff that would knock you right out and put you to sleep, *good*.

Speaking of Sandman… There is an urban legend out there about me withholding Somas from Sunny unless I got a blowjob. It was something like I was holding them in my fist and wouldn't open it until she finished the act on me. Then immediately after the act, I would open my hand and relinquish over to her a bunch of sweet pills. While it’s a great story, it is just that — *a story,* and Sandman made the whole thing up. He is stupid. If this story did happen, it wasn't with me on the other end of Tammy’s dick-sucking lips. Maybe it was someone who looked like me, like Abdullah the Butcher, or Kamala. I don’t know.

My theory is that after doing a bunch of coke, Sandman said that bullshit to some dirtsheet writer while he was trying to be funny. Then they printed

it and everyone thought I was a scumbag. The reason I can blame Sandman's fiction writing on him taking coke is because…
I did the coke with him just before that interview. But, yeah, either way, the Sunny story was just bullshit, legit.

EXTREME RISING

I have another story about pills getting me into some trouble. Let's fast forward to 2012 for a minute, after ECW had long since been out of business. A promotion was eventually created to try to fill the void of hardcore wrestling that Extreme Championship Wrestling left behind. This was called *Extreme Rising*.

I came in one night before a show. I was achy and beat up from a rough couple of dates and someone gave me a bunch of muscle relaxers. I took them and they worked a little, but not enough. Soon after that, another one of the boys said he had more pills he was willing to share but was hesitant.

"We have an autograph signing first thing at 9:00 in the morning, he said. "You are more than welcome to them, but I don't know if you should take the pills, because we have early autograph signing we have to go to."

"Don't worry about me," I replied. I put my hand out. "That wasn't part of our deal, and it is the first I am hearing about it. I am not going to that appearance, so it doesn't even matter."

The good brother was cool and shared his goods. I took the pills and disappeared into my room. My little tiny tag partners did me good that night. Just before I went to sleep, I popped a mess of those Somas. Before I was totally down for the count, through all of the purple haze I remembered what he said about the autograph signing.

Shit! They are going to try to wake me up in the morning for that damn appearance. That ain't happening.

At that, I decided to let the drugs help me be creative. It worked for Jimi Hendrix and The Beatles, so why not me.
I channeled the innovative demons, got off the bed, and rearranged the furniture like Paige Davis on an episode of Trading Places. First, I slid the dresser across the room in front of the door, and then I flipped it up over on

its side. Then, I grabbed everything I could that wasn't bolted down in the place and barricaded my door like the motherfucking Alamo.

When I was done, it looked like someone turned the room 90-degrees like a giant snow globe, and all the shit inside slid and shifted to one side.

The next morning, just as I had expected, some lame bastard was calling my hotel room phone at, like, 7:00 a.m. with a wakeup call reminder for the autograph signing.

“Fuck,” I said.

Groggy as hell, I reached over and returned the morning pleasantry with one of my own. *BANG!* I slammed down the receiver, hard.

Einstein either couldn’t figure out what that meant or just didn't take the hint and called me right back. So, I did it again.

I lingered by the edge of the bed waiting for a third ring to slam, but then there was nothing. I leaned back into my pillow and was drifting… *drifting.* I was almost asleep when I finally heard that bullshit third ring.

“What in the fuck?!” I grunted.

On the third ring, I realized that whoever was calling must not have been a rocket scientist, so I jumped out of bed, and I picked up the phone. Now, when I say I “picked up the phone,” that part is true, but I did not pick it up to talk. I picked it up in my hands while it was still ringing, ripped the cord out of the wall, and threw it across the room toward the pile of shit at the doorway.

I knew that it wouldn't be long before they would be knocking on my door, trying to get me to go and drive somewhere and sign some stupid shit at, like, eight in the morning. I didn’t agree to that, and it wasn't happening.

So, because I didn't have any earplugs that could drown out the sound of a promoter’s cronies, I decided to tag out and rely on my little tag partners again; I just took some more Somas and sleeping pills, then went back to sleep.

Just as I had predicted, the promoters came and tried to wake me up, but it was not happening. I was didn’t hear anything. I was in *“La La Land.”*

Though I was unconscious during their efforts, they tried and tried to knock the door down but my barricade worked.

The promoter's next course of action was to try to see if they could get into my room by going to the room next to me.

Raven was in the room next to mine and we had adjoining doors. I know they asked him if he knew what was up, and he told them I was fine because he could hear me snoring.

Raven knew the deal. He had had his share of ridiculous demands from promoters. He had my back, but that didn't matter. I guess the promoters didn't care and decided to try to break in and get me when I didn't answer their wake up calls or all of their knocking.

I think I remembered hearing the knocking, and it pissed me off so I may have woken up just long enough to take a few more pills. Those really knocked me out.

Eventually, these rock scientists got the cops involved and told them they thought I evidently was dying. I was absolutely fine, but the promoters were probably just mad that I didn't make it to their autograph signing and also concerned that I would not be up in time for their wrestling show. I definitely would have been at the wrestling show, as that is what they are officially booked me for. And again, I had never agreed to some autograph signing to start with.

I woke up in a hospital room. Fortunately for me, I did not have any identification on me, so it was very easy for me to leave the hospital when I came to and make it back to the hotel. When I got there, I remember I had $1,000 in cash in my wallet. A lot of the guys said that they knew the money was in there, and they all started blaming each other for who must've taken the cash out. In the end, after trying to track it down, I was out of luck. A lot of my stuff was gone along with that money and even my shoes.

After that incident, everyone was worried about me. My family was very concerned so I agreed to go to rehab, but only for them.

A lot of people will say how rehab was the best thing to ever happen to them. But for me, or rehab was just boring.

Everybody would get up in the morning and drink coffee.

Wait. Caffeine is a drug, right?

It was like going to jail, but a nice, fancy jail with brown roast and creamers. After everyone filled their mugs, we would go into this big room and all the people would tell their war stories.

The very first day, I remember we all got together and pushed the seats into a big circle so we could look at everybody.

“Hello. I guess I will start,” one of the old grizzled vet AA guys said. “I’m Joe.”

“Hello, Joe!” They all said back.

“My name is Joe, and I am an alcoholic.”

Then, Joe went into a big diatribe. It was a long, involved story about how he started small, but his addiction took him over until he hit rock bottom. He talked about taking a shit and picking the pills out of his poop and popping them back into his mouth to take them again, or some nasty-ass thing like that.

After Joe was done, some guy Tom would try to outdo him. When he was done, then a guy named John went… then Mike.

If I were a stand-up comedian or a writer or something, maybe I would have been able to get some good material from all that. But let me tell you, it got old real quick.

When it was finally my turn to get up and cut a promo, I didn't do anything extra for my rehab stay. I didn't want to play their game at all. So, the very first day of horror story promos, when all heads turned my way, I nodded and said . . .

“My name is Terry, *and I pass.”*

Then, I quickly sat back in my chair.

The room was quiet. It wasn’t the first time that someone didn’t want to cooperate, and they weren’t offended by it. I just think the word choice left them a little unsettled.

Honestly, I liked the vibe it set. So, that became my gimmick. Whenever it came to my turn in the big circle jerk, I would just say the same thing.

“My name is Terry. Pass.”

“My name is Terry. Pass.”

A few weeks in, it may have changed to something like…

“My name is Terry, and yeah, you guessed it. I pass.”

I must have ended up being a bad influence on all of the people who were used to being under the influence. At the end of thirty days, all the drunk people ran out of things to say to pop the crowd. I guess a number of them had already used their best “snorting coke out of hooker’s asshole” stories. So, in the very final days of rehab, everybody would get their mugs of coffee, get into the big circle, and then pretty much say the same thing. I guess I trained them well.

“Hello. My name Joe. Pass.”
“Hello. My name is Mike. I pass, too.”
Fucking gimmick infringement.









JOEL GERTNER on SABU AT A PARTY

This beautiful passage is being brought to you from Joel. . .

"*Not even the sick shit YOUR MOM used to do with me in Philly when she was being as filthy as a two-dollar whore… could challenge Sabu's in-ring insanity when it came to hardcore… Sure, she was filled like a donut and stuffed crazy with my cream… but Sabu was blood-soaked bonkers, repaired with superglue, …and undeniably extreme!"*

. . .Gertner.

Well, well, well!

Now, I remember hanging with Sabu one time, and it was late at night. Everyone was there after the show. All the ECW boys were closing down the night by cracking open a few cold ones. We were all chillin'. Everyone was just being themselves.

It's all a blur now just what town we were in. I wonder why? But anyhow, we were in a hotel room, somewhere, probably in the middle of nowhere. I do remember it was one of those motel-style, ground floor, outdoor spots, and we had the back door open a crack. Sabu was in the room with us for sure and, in fact, I think it might have actually been his room we were in, after all.

Now, I really liked hanging out with Sabu whenever I could. He was a super cool dude whose work I had already admired for years, even before I got to ECW.

On this particular night like any other night, I tried to show my friendship the way I always do; by trying to get people to laugh their asses off and lose their minds.

At this point in time, cell phones were just becoming mainstream but the technology still kind of sucked. They were still buggy. It was becoming a regular occurrence to be talking with someone on the phone and being told, "I'm sorry I can't hear you, I'm at a bad cell site." Yeah, this was becoming a thing.

So, there were like a dozen or more of us all sitting there having fun, and I'm playfully messing with Sabu by talking to him all choppy, mimicking

bad cell phone reception. You know, I was making my voice cut in and out as if I were speaking to him with a bad connection.

Sabu had a few to drink and was honestly a little messed up. The look on his face was priceless! He was legitimately trying to figure out if what he was hearing (and not hearing) was real. Sabu just couldn't understand why some of my words weren't making it to his eardrums, and others did.

I think he was legit freaked out (or at least sold it like he was) when he saw that my lips kept moving but some of the time there was a voice with it, and some of the time it was just lips moving with no voice. He started hitting the side of his head like swimmers do to get the water out!

To continue to have him question what he just ingested when he wasn't looking, I started making a "gobble-gobble" chicken sound.

That did it. The chicken thing really got him paranoid. He jumped out of bed and started looking all around. He looked under the beds, he looked in the closet, and he looked in the bathroom. He told everyone in the place to look out and be careful.

"Seriously, guys, I think there is a bird or something in here!"

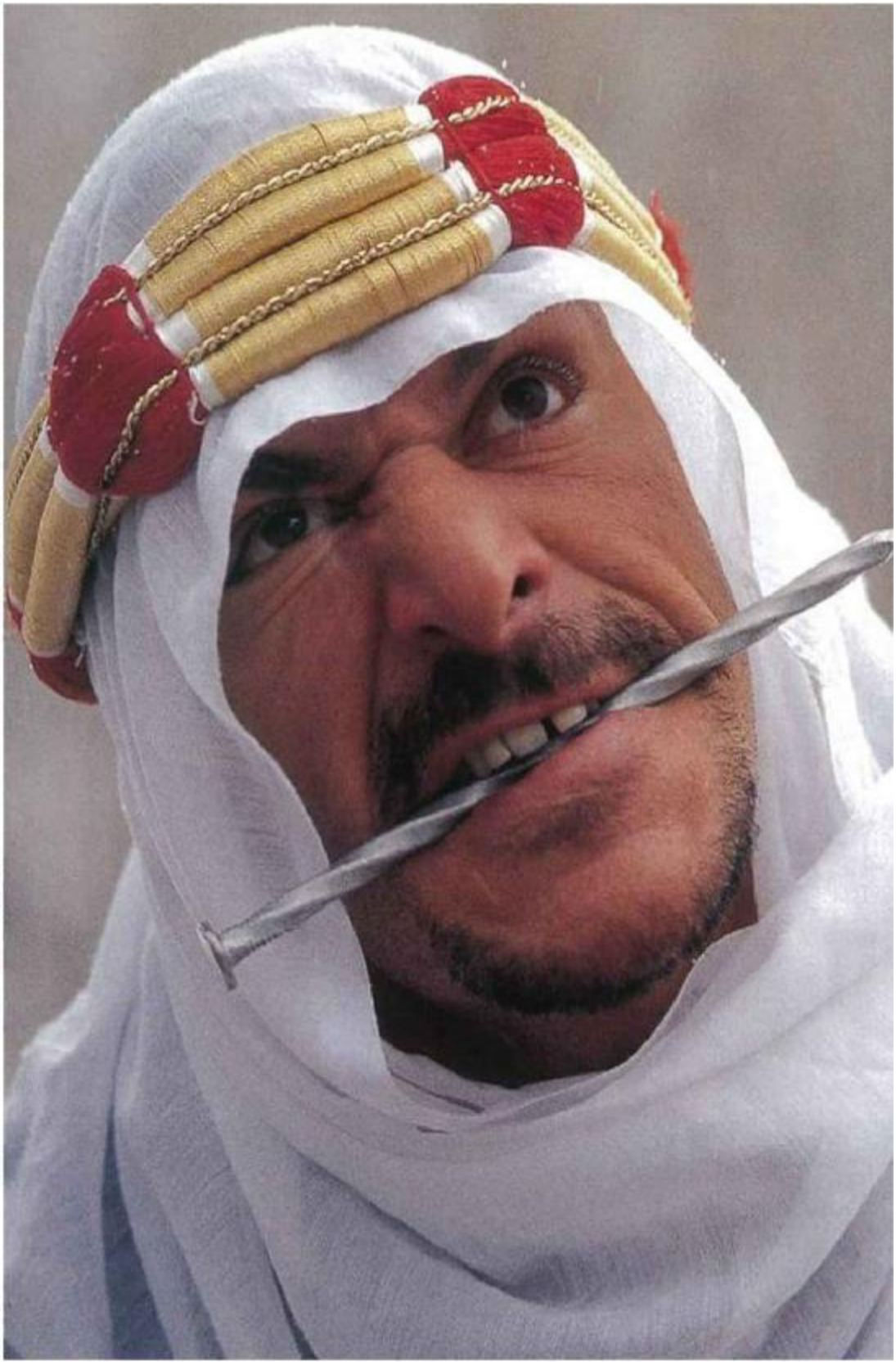
Now, was he so fucked up that he really believed that a chicken ducked into the room from the back door? Or was he just working us all for a laugh himself?

Who knows?!

It was awesome either way.

"*WATCH OUT! THERE'S A FUCKING TURKEY IN THE ROOM!*"

– Joel Gertner



CHAPTER 9 – NEW JAPAN JUMP

Come April 1995, after being scheduled for a three-way dance for the ECW World Tag Team titles with Taz, I publically “no-showed” the event to accept a booking in Japan for New Japan Pro Wrestling (NJPW). Some may recall Paul Heyman publicly and legitimately firing me at the ECW event. This is the perfect opportunity to explain why.

My career wrestling in Japan at this point with FMW was huge. I was only wrestling once every so often for ECW and this is why I chose Japan over ECW. The thing about it was, though, if I was to go work a match for FMW, I may have thought twice. However, it was New Japan calling, and I had to make a really hard decision. With New Japan looking to give me a contract, I accepted, and this quickly made me double-booked for two very big events.

You can’t blame a guy for wanting to make a living. In New Japan, for one, the money was better. Much better. I’m talking money like five times better than what ECW was bringing me in. New Japan sold out stadiums.

Now, while I was wrestling all the time for FMW, I was in and out of ECW, working for them in America, and Onita in Japan. But I didn’t quit and leave Onita high and dry. He was always good to me. Actually, I have a story about the jump from FMW to New Japan before I no-showed ECW.

Professionally, I didn’t really like being the FMW Junior Heavyweight Champion. The division was very exciting, don’t get me wrong, but as a “junior heavy” I would never be considered a top guy there because I was never working in a main event. To up my game as my FMW contract was about to expire, I was going to ask to move up to the heavyweight division. But I also gave a call to Tiger Hattori, a famous NJPW referee in who handled bookings for that company, just to see what my chances were, perhaps, down the road. I wasn’t even sure, honestly, if they would even know who I was, *but boy was I wrong!*

I found out they knew exactly who I was and Tiger told me they were totally interested. Because I was getting exposure in both ECW in the States and also in Japan with FMW, Tiger said he wanted to talk to some of the title committee members and would get right back to me “with an offer.” I couldn’t believe it.

I didn’t have to wait long. Tiger called me right back and offered me a contract practically on the spot.

Then came the hard part: having to give my two weeks’ notice.

FMW let me be me. They put me on the map. I mean, I know that I helped get them over as well, but the idea of leaving them was a little scary to me. They were practically family. In fact, with my uncle still in the locker room, they were family.

I’m sure you can all relate to this; working somewhere you like, but having to leave all the people you worked with day-in and day-out. The decision itself was a no-brainer. The money was way, way, way too good to pass up over in New Japan, and the potential to work in main events was there. I was afraid at first that by accepting the offer, the people in FMW might think that I was a sellout, or maybe that my move was somewhat disrespectful. So when I walked into the venue that FMW was using for a show that afternoon, I was walking on eggshells.

The first person I saw was one of the young boys.

“Hey man, where is The Sheik?” I asked.

The young boy nodded. He didn’t speak very good English but acknowledged he knew and urged me to follow.

When I came around the corner in the small arena, there was The Sheik, and he was talking to Onita. I stopped following the young boy a second and waved him on as if to say I didn’t want to approach them yet. He understood.

While collecting my thoughts on how I was going to explain my jumping to New Japan, I listened to them talk for a moment. Interestingly enough, my uncle was discussing a deal for me with the head of FMW, Onita.

It was then that I realized that I was actually about to walk in during the negotiation in the dressing room to tell them I was leaving for New Japan.

Onita respected The Sheik. Abdullah the Butcher was booking for some of the American wrestlers a number of years ago. He assigned Onita as a young boy to help take care of Sheik back when he was doing tours for Giant Baba’s All Japan Pro Wrestling. Onita used to actually carry The Sheik’s bag, bring him his meals, and even lace up his boots before matches. Therefore, I knew that Onita would listen to what my uncle had to say and give me the very best deal that he could.

The problem with this situation was, the very best FMW had to offer wouldn't even compare to what they were offering me at NJPW. I knew that I was going to have to turn down their very best.

I took a deep breath and walked around the corner.

"Speaking of the devil himself," my uncle said. "Here he is."

I nodded, and then reluctantly explained my situation.

Onita was startled at first but didn't want to hold me back at all. He knew NJPW would really help take me to the next level and that I had to take advantage of the great opportunity. At this point, the best way I could explain the two companies in terms of American wrestling is that FMW was like working for Ring of Honor, and New Japan was like working for the WWF. There really was no comparison.

Onita shook my hand and bowed. I had his blessing.

Then, I looked over at my uncle. He was a man of few words, and I was worried at first that he may have not liked the fact that I didn't consult him first about the situation.

"You getting more money?"

"Yeah."

"Good," he said. "Because then you can send me some once you get there!"

If Sheik had said, "No. You aren't taking it." I probably wouldn't have gone, either. But he knew it was for the best.

Everything turned out fine. They both seemed far happier for me than I had hoped for, and I'm glad I did it the right way. It wasn't a double cross at all. I wasn't going to show up to New Japan and shit all over FMW to put the other promotion over. I made the jump with a blessing.

Before leaving ECW officially in the states, I made my NJPW debut on January 4, 1995, in the world famous Tokyo Dome. That place was a monster. Speaking of monsters, in my very first match there, they teamed me up with Masahiro Chono and they put us over on Junji Hirata and the great Tatsumi Fujinami. They really were great, too. It was an honor to be placed in the same match with those guys.

After that, Chono and I teamed up again on some more cards taking on the Heisei-Ishingun stable.

Making that decision to leave FMW was tough, however. I was out on my own in a strange bigger world. Leaving my uncle's side at FMW was

definitely part of my initial hesitation. Deep down, I knew he would always have a home in Onita's promotion, but I had to factor in the idea that it wouldn't be long before he would age out.

I was right.

NEW JAPAN DEBUT

A few months into my first stay with New Japan, I was given the opportunity to highlight my abilities on a much larger level than ever before. They booked me to compete for the most important lightweight championship title in the world, the IWGP Junior Heavyweight Championship. On May 3, 1995, I defeated Koji Kanemoto in the Fukuoka Dome in Fukuoka, Japan winning the title with the Arabian Press Moonsault.

Just for the record, Kanemoto was a fucking dickhead! Now, I didn't know what to expect from New Japan, being new there. Kanemoto is one of the guys that set the tone right off the bat for me at the start of our program after my NJPW debut. His asshole ways almost made me think that I might not like working with anyone in the New Japan locker room at the time.

Kanemoto figured that since he was the Junior Heavyweight champion, he wasn't going to sell any of my moves. After our first match, I went up to Mr. Saito, an older wrestler I knew some from the States.

"How did it go?" Saito asked.

"All right, but that son of a bitch didn't want to sell my shit."

Saito shook his head. He took a moment to find the right words, then finally said, "Next time, *make him sell it.*"

"Make him?"

"You make him work with you. If he doesn't, make him sell it. You understand?" he asked me.

"I think so."

"Don't think. If he does something again, don't tell him not to, *make him not to.*"

The next night, I was out in the ring and Kanemoto tried stretching me. Saito's words ran through my head again, "Don't tell him. *Make him.*"

I balled up my fist and punched him dead in the face.

WHOMP!

Kanemoto went right down. He tried to stiffen up on me again, and I just let him have it again and took it home.

The next night, I didn't even wait for his bullshit. I just fucking beat him the fuck up. I beat the monkey-shit right out of him. At the end of the match, I went to shake his hand, and he slapped my mouth so hard I thought I almost broke my jaw again. He knew he hit me too hard and jumped out of the ring. Not even trying to make things look good, I ran right after him.

He took off running down the aisle and right into the locker room. I finally caught him in the dressing room, and the pussy said, "It was an accident."

I thought about kicking his ass again but figured that could get me kicked off the tour, so I decided against it. Cunt-e-moto never tried anything with me again after that, but that didn't change what I thought about him. I didn't like him then, and I don't like him now. Karma finally came for that prick. He had to finally suck it up and drop his title to me on 5/3/95. Despite the fact that there were a handful of cock-knockers in the New Japan locker like Koji Kanemoto, the promotion itself put me over big.

I didn't have time to enjoy it, though. Right as my career was really taking off in New Japan, my uncle's was coming to a screeching halt. Two days after winning the IWGP Junior Heavyweight title, The Sheik's last big show was about to come.

Sheik's last match was against Terry Funk at Kawasaki Stadium. It was like any other and no real liberties were taken. They had worked a number of times before, but by this time in his career, Sheik's finite number of bumps just started to catch up with him.

After the show, my uncle was waiting for a cab and his left arm went numb. He tried to shake it off, but then a few seconds later, he was having difficulty breathing. After that, he had some scary chest pains. While he was in the cab, he actually had to change the destination.

Sheik was supposed to meet me, and we were going to head off to the airport together to leave the country. Working for another promotion, I was staying at a different hotel and was a good distance away. His chest pains got out of control. At about the time he was supposed to be picking me up, three attendants were picking him up and putting him on a hospital gurney.

Being the stubborn man he was, it's a good thing he didn't just wait for it to subside. As hypocritical as it may sound coming from me, he did right going to the hospital. We both thought the same way. Hospitals went against our normal ways of thinking when it came to injuries, but a heart attack just isn't fixable with superglue.

After waiting a while for my uncle to show up, I became impatient and called Onita. He just got the news himself that Sheik had been rushed to the emergency room and my stomach dropped.

Is this it? Is he gone? I didn't even get to say goodbye, yet. No. No!

I called for another taxi. When I got the hospital, I ran into the emergency room, and patted myself on the chest and pointed. They rushed me up to a cubical surrounded by a curtain.

Some nurses and a doctor were there working on him. He had a mask over his mouth for breathing, and he was hooked up to a machine.

It wasn't long before I learned that The Sheik had, in fact, suffered a heart attack after his match waiting for the cab. There was nothing I could do but wait.

When they showed me out to the waiting room, there was some kind of baseball game replaying on the television. I couldn't help but wonder if it was the bottom of the ninth for The Sheik, but I knew he was a fighter. If anyone could pull off a major play and get back in the game, it was him. I got up. I paced around some, then I thought of his wife.

His family. They have no idea what is going on.

I rushed down the hall and called my Aunt Joyce on a payphone in the lobby. We barely spoke. I told her the bare minimum and she was off. She immediately grabbed the next flight to Japan, but wouldn't be there for almost a day.

That first night was rough. He was out the whole time. I sat by his bed after they told me I could. I didn't do much of anything but listen to him breathe. My eyes hurt. I was too exhausted to sleep.

The next few days were touch and go. Eventually, he came through it all, but couldn't speak at first. He nodded and acknowledged that I was there, but then was in and out. When it was all said and done, he was okay, but they told him that he was finished. It was then that they gave my uncle his death sentence: *You can never wrestle again.*

So around the time that my career was taking off like never before, my teacher's had mostly come to an end. He still did some little shots here and there for another three years or so, but he couldn't really have any real matches anymore. His heart just couldn't handle it. He had one hell of a run though; from 1950 to 1995 or so, and spot appearances until 1998. He just kept on going until his body wouldn't let him anymore. Now that is dedication.

LOSING THE TURBAN

I wrestled a shitload of matches for NJPW in 1995 and never looked back. Working what would total to about 65 dates for the number one promotion in the Land of the Rising Sun.

As I mentioned before, on May 3, 1995 in the Fukuoka Dome, I won the IWGP Junior Heavyweight Title. After the fiasco with my uncle's health scare had calmed down a little, I still wasn't in the best mindset.

My uncle was my mentor, my teacher, and my friend. He had done so much for me and almost losing him was horrible. I learned so much from him. With my jump over to New Japan, he suggested that I switch my ring entrance gear to look more sinister. His idea was to change the turban I was wearing to something more like his. After that, he actually gave me one of his from his own personal collection. Changing from the cheap shitty turban that looked like a bunch of toilet paper wrapped around my head to one of my uncle's was a definite upgrade.

Come June 12th, 1995 in Osaka, I was set to defend my IWGP Junior Heavyweight Title against Black Tiger II, aka Eddie Guerrero in a mask. Some of you may have seen this clip before, as it is listed online as being one of the worst fan-wrestler interactions of all time. Here is what happened.

On my way to the ring, a fan decided to get too up close and personal. Taking home a souvenir at my expense was really bad timing, especially when that object was something given to me by someone special who literally almost just died.

This fan had the bright idea to steal my headdress right off my head while I was walking to the ring for my match. Ballsy! That was like stealing Superman's cape!

I lost it. I'll admit it. I was insulted and reacted.

I went nuts and hopped the barricade to go after my uncle's head-wrap and my honor. I couldn't let someone steal that from me live on TV. That would set a bad precedence. I decided right then that if a fan were going to leave the arena with a present from me that night that they were also going to leave with a "gift receipt." That receipt was going to document an elbow, some right hands, and the best advice ever that he could tell to all his buddies:

"You don't take Hogan's bandana. You don't steal Austin's beer. You don't cut Hacksaw's 2x4 or kill Jake's snake. And no matter what you do, you absolutely don't steal Sabu's motherfucking turban."

When interacting with a wrestler who is used to fighting in exploding barbwire matches, I think it is safe to say it probably isn't the best idea to piss them off. I mean, yeah, I think if you choose to steal from a wrestler, you risk them fighting back, but attacking a particular one who seemingly isn't afraid to injure himself permanently to get a job done is probably an even worse idea.

In the end, I think this fan just wasn't even thinking at all. Either that, or he was maybe suicidal and had no real reason to leave the arena alive that night.

So, after that fan's hand locked on the turban and my headdress went flying, seconds later, I was flying, too. I jumped over the rail and dove right onto this brilliant rocket scientist. Figuring security would quickly break it up, I guessed I would have at least had enough time to get my message out there. However, security was nowhere to be found, so I just kept beating the shit out of him, waiting to be stopped. No security and not even one man in the audience tried to stop me.

I didn't get my turban back. As I was punching him, I couldn't seem to figure out where he had hidden it and knew there wasn't time to strip search him before the match. So, knowing it was gone, I decided to get my share of welts in on the fan's skull so at least I would know his head would hurt too much to try to wear my headdress anytime soon.

As quickly as the fight started, it was all over. I made my way to the ring for the next one. When I got in there, Eddie was laughing.

He said from under the mask that he saw the whole thing and it was quite possible that I had actually beat up the wrong guy.

In looking back at the tape, Eddie may have been right. I may have grabbed the wrong guy. After our match, some poor dude may have woken up at ringside and probably had no clue why he was seeing stars.

TITLE FOR TITLE

I was back in Tokyo's Nippon Budokan Dome on June 14, 1995, in front of a huge house. Our rematch for my IWGP Junior Heavyweight was set. This time, it was a title-for-title bout where Koji Kanemoto's newly won UWA World Welterweight Championship was also on the line. In the end, I dropped the belt back to Kanemoto. Holding the IWGP Junior Heavyweight title was great for me, even if I only held it for a short time. It gave me even more credibility and continued to grow my brand.

That wasn’t the only gold I’d hold during this tour, however. After the UWA closed up shop in 1995, Gran Hamada brought his UWA World Junior Light Heavyweight title with him from Mexico to New Japan.

The UWA World Junior Light Heavyweight Championship is a prestigious title that was always exclusively defended in Mexico for a promotion called Universal Wrestling Association. UWA ran from 1975 to 1995, but upon bringing Hamada in for this Japanese tour, Japan adopted the Mexican belt for a period at this time. (It has since then returned to Mexico where it's now defended on the independent circuit.)

The UWA was a large promotion and pretty internationally-known, so they decided to have a number of wrestlers work a series of shots at the strap during his tour in New Japan. I was one of these wrestlers. This program in itself was very odd. A Mexican championship being defended in Japan wasn’t a normal occasion, so Hamada’s run promised to get a lot of attention from the sheets. It was also good for me to have this series of matches with him.

While ECW was going on in America without me, it was pretty cool to be an American wrestler competing for a Mexican title in a Japanese promotion eating a bowl full of Italian spaghetti Neapolitan before the bout. I figured if I threw in some European uppercuts and some side-Russian leg-sweeps into our match, people would really think I was really all over the place.

So, at the Todoroki Arena in Kawasaki, it was such a weird matchup that many more eyes were on me than usual.

I won the UWA World Junior Light Heavyweight title.

MEANWHILE IN AMERICA…

I can't lie. I heard ECW was doing well in the States and it is possible I lost some sleep on the decision that double-booking. *ECW or New Japan?* While I was winning some titles in Japan and making some great money, I wondered what would have happened if I had stayed in the States. Making a big decision like that is always stressful. In hindsight though for me, I think I made the right one.

After unintentionally double-booking myself, I felt that I really had to choose the New Japan date over the ECW date. For one, the difference in pay was substantial. I was making $6,000 a match in New Japan, as compared to $1,000 I would have made for the ECW show. But that wasn't all. I talked to international guys like Benoit and Malenko who all agreed and offered the same advice. They told me the decision was a no-brainer. Turning down an entire tour with New Japan instead of working a spot show was crazy. It wasn't even just the money difference between the double-booked shows, it was quality and quantity. ECW was really catching on, but it was still small. They offered only a handful of paydays in America versus a whole bunch of bigger guaranteed shows overseas with the much bigger promotion, NJPW.

Yeah, I was pissed about how Heyman handled it. Instead of changing something around, he took it personally and decided to bury me on TV. He could have easily said I was out on injury, or even just said there was a change on the card – but he decided to take the low road. He got in the ring and told the fans that I chose somewhere else to go and basically ditched them.

Only months after getting fired from ECW back in the States in 1995, I heard the ECW fans were being brainwashed by Paul. To cover his ass for not being to produce me at one event, he continued to trash talk me in commentary for weeks. He said I was a total sellout and disloyal to the American fans. The fans ate it up for a time.

The weird thing was, just before that big event I missed, we already had it all figured out. I had worked things out with him so I could keep my commitment to New Japan and still come back to the States and fix everything up on TV. However, I think Paul E. got jealous that he was not my first priority and just decided to bury me.

If you watch any of the old tapes in the summer of 1995 or so, you can constantly hear crowds at ECW chanting "FUCK SABU!" or "SABU SUCKS!" It is true, this smarter demographic of fans had read everything they could about my departure and also drank Paul's Kool-Aid. But the negative reaction to my void didn't mean that they didn't like me. It meant that I was severely missed.

UBAS

Some say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. In this case, I think those same people would have to say, "Imitation was the sincerest form of desperation."

In my absence, ECW scrambled to fill my void to satisfy the hunger fans had for my style. Many of the boys took to imitating some of the things I did in the ring to try to win over the crowd. That was not enough for Paul Heyman.

Pablo Márquez, an ECW enhancement wrestler who usually wrestled under the name "El Puerto Riqueño," was given back the gimmick that they found him with, impersonating me on the indies. Back in his old persona, he became "Ubas" again, which is basically "Sabu" spelled backwards. This gimmick was similar to mine, but like a Bizarro Superman version; a twisted rendition of my long hair, headdress, baggy pants, and arm tape.

Now, I had actually worked with Pablo and even helped train him some, so there was no heat there. I honestly didn't care he was playing a part that

looked just like me. I looked at the gimmick infringement as a payday for the kid and a way to keep my name alive at the same time. He wasn't even on my radar, and I was cool with it.

Do you know why Vince never mentioned WCW on WWF programming? That is because he felt it actually promoted his competition to some degree and gave them exposure. It was a credibility issue. He felt it was like "giving them play." Well, one could argue that ECW using Ubas on their programming was actually keeping my name alive in America when I wasn't there to keep my brand relevant. This was good and left the door open for a possible and eventual return for me, at least somewhere. My name was alive in ECW, but I was free from ECW responsibilities. In the meantime, I was able to devote all my focus on my tour in New Japan. Because of this, my hard work was starting to really pay off.

END OF NEW JAPAN TOUR

After working that a program with Gran Hamada, our series of matches ended with me defeating him for the UWA World Junior Light Heavyweight Championship on November 23, 1995. With my tour appearances coming to an end, I lost the Mexican strap in Niigata, Japan to El Samurai. Come December 11, 1995, in Osaka, I made my final appearance with NJPW tagging with Hiro Saito, defeating Dean Malenko and Wild Pegasus.

When my NJPW tour ended, I continued to work some in Japan. During this period of time, I picked up some more dates with Onita and had some great matches with FMW's rising star Hayabusa, before returning back to the States.



KEVIN SULLIVAN on SABU & WCW

When I was young, I went and saw The Sheik wrestle in Detroit and the building felt like it completely moved from just the energy of what was going on in the ring. Sheik was wrestling Spiros Arion for Vince Sr. that night, and Spiros was like the number two babyface. I couldn't believe my eyes. The Sheik destroyed him in three minutes. I didn't know how it worked back then and had a hunch that wrestling was fake… but after seeing that I believed The Sheik was an exception to the rule. "He had to be real."

That night actually made me want to become a professional wrestler and planted the seeds that would eventually lead me to the ring. The Sheik was one of the greatest villains of all time, and he was one of the very few responsible for ushering in what we would eventually know as "hardcore wrestling." He was the master, then there was Terry Funk, and then eventually the master student, Sabu.

Sheik booked me in Detroit for his shows in Cobo arena out of Detroit. In real life, Sheik was often said to not be a good "payoff man" by some of the boys, however, he always treated me well when he booked me for Big Time Wrestling; food, transportation - everything.

In Georgia Championship Wrestling, The Sheik and I crossed paths. I was eventually lucky enough to be able to call the Sheik both a friend and an opponent. And over time, he had a shadow I befriended, and its name was Sabu.

I first met Sabu on a wrestling tour for The Bearman in Ontario. The moment I saw Sabu step in the ring, I knew that he had it and was eventually going to make a name for himself. The Sheik trained him well. He followed his uncle's lead on how to act inside and outside of the ring, and Sabu put his body on the line every single night, no matter how many fans were in attendance.

What a person to be able to learn from! Sheik was funny because he stayed in character 24/7. Sometimes they would come to stay with me when they were in Florida. If we went out to eat after a show, the Sheik would insist on paying and make Sabu run out to his car. Then, Sabu would return and break out these big bags of money, filled with twenties. Sheik would pick through the cash slowly so all the employees could see. He would take

out one or two of the bills to pay the tab, then send the rest back with his nephew. Sabu always took good care of his uncle. He did whatever he asked, and I am sure that a lot of The Sheik's "living the gimmick" message paid off for him, as well.

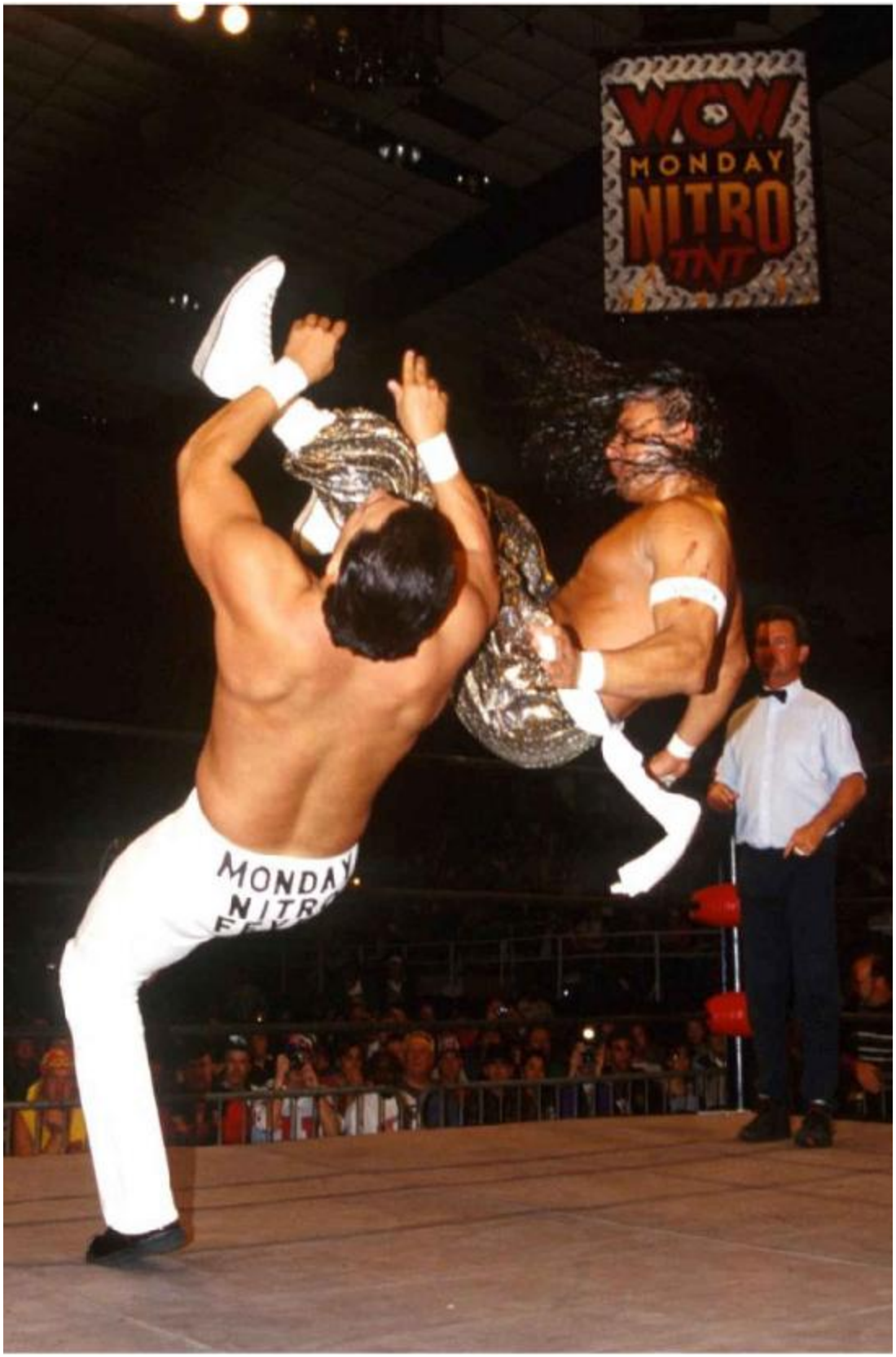
Sabu and I worked together in FMW and I saw the sacrifices he made, first hand. When Paul Hayman brought him in for ECW, he already had made a name for himself worldwide and then soared to even new heights.

Come WCW, Both JJ and I knew he would have been the biggest thing ever there and got him approval for life changing money. However, it's too bad that somebody didn't like him there and messed up his contract before it could even happen. That person was an asshole. All I can say is that like a handful of very great talents out there, Sabu got screwed by the business. It's a shame that the originator of a lot of what you see in American professional wrestling today was skipped over and not given his due.

Sabu is the man. He's the only guy who should ever be remembered as the innovator of the super hardcore.

- KEVIN SULLIVAN




WCW
MONDAY
NITRO
TNT
MONDAY

CHAPTER 10 – WCW

So, yes, just as Kevin Sullivan said, I had two dealings with WCW in my career where I could have made some major money, but neither time was so great.

My first time dealing with Ted Turner's Atlanta-based World Championship Wrestling was around September 1995. What happened was, WCW was looking to scoop up familiar names for their first ever WCW Monday Nitro show. Ted Turner had given them the green light to compete directly with WWF, and they knew that they needed name talent with mainstream appeal.

What happened was Kevin Sullivan, a guy I had worked with some in the past, wanted to bring me in and gave me a call.

“So, Sabu,” he said. “We got the new Nitro show coming up. How much would it cost to bring you in?”

I knew their deal hearing it from others. Spot appearances were usually $500. If they liked what they saw, they would give you more gigs and for more money.

“The $500 works,” I said.

Without any kind of contract, I agreed to appear for a limited schedule and figures that Kevin set up for me on the fly. He figured the stint would last about three months, and I even had a PPV appearance in the mix too so I was happy. I figured that was all just for WCW to give me a look, but it turned out that Kevin’s bosses figured that I was okay with just taking the lowball $500 for every show. They kind of figured wrong.

So I made my WCW debut on the September 11, 1995, episode of *WCW Monday Nitro* against Alex Wright. I found out in the locker room that Alex was actually afraid to wrestle me. He had heard about my “hardcore ways” and was worried that I was going to shoot on him. I sat him down really quick and told him that he was just believing a work and that I was actually very good and safe in the ring. Alex appreciated that I had the chat with him and everything turned out just fine. I made sure to take good care of him, as I always did with pretty much anyone.

They wanted me to seem pretty brutal and nuts. So what they did was have me win the match and immediately reverse the decision after I went crazy after the win for no real reason putting Alex Wright through a table.

They had me wrestling the cruiserweights in the early days of the division. I even had a match at the Halloween Havoc PPV against “Mr. JL” aka Jerry Lynn from ECW! Because there were some old-timers in the locker room, I also got my uncle an appearance and a payday. During the match, there was a spot that we didn’t communicate well with my uncle. Jerry and I took things to the outside and fell into the Sheik’s hip and leg, actually breaking bones. After winning the match, The Sheik was injured but was still able to chuck one of his trademarks fireball in Jerry’s face.

After the PPV, I was excited to get the payday. I knew that PPV money meant good checks for most, but I was disappointed when I discovered that there was no bump up from the $500 payday.

I complained to Kevin Sullivan and learned that the office apparently had me pegged for $500 no matter what I did and assumed that was just our deal. I threatened to quit, and Kevin (who always liked and supported me) told me he would see what he could do.

In the meantime, my next match in WCW was against the world famous Disco Inferno, who had the greatest hair in wrestling. That didn’t matter, though. I still won.

While they were figuring my appearance fee out, I had a few days off. During that down time, I decided to go work a show for Dennis Coralluzzo at NWA New Jersey to earn some extra income while waiting for WCW. Dennis made me a good offer, even better than WCW was offering per show, and so I went off to do a couple of spots.

Bischoff found out about my matches with the NWA and called me to see if I had quit WCW.

“No, sir,” I said. “I did not. I’ve just been waiting to hear back from you.”

“So then why are you working shows on the independents?”

“The office said they were considering a new deal for me, but I still haven’t heard back from them is all.”

“So you took another booking?” he asked.

“I took the NWA show in the meantime because I needed the money. The problem is, I’m not under contract and just making one-off appearance shots for everything — even pay-per-views. There is nothing set in stone, but I would like there to be,” I said. “I want to work for you.”

“Well, hold on from taking any more gigs for now and just wait to hear back from us, okay?” Bischoff said.

I agreed.

So, I called up Dennis and canceled a few dates that we were planning in good faith so I could return back to WCW fresh like they requested. I sat home for about two weeks when I got a call on the phone from a friend. I was reluctant to pay the $.99 cents-a-minute or ask my mom for permission, but he insisted that I call the WCW Hotline to hear just what Mean Gene Okerlund was saying about me. Once I did, I found out through the public recording that I had been fired!

Ultimately they said that they fired me for putting someone through a table, though I am sure that was not the case. The thing that was really chicken shit was that no one had the decency to call me and tell me that I was being let go. I found that out, plus all kinds of hot wrestling news on the WCW Hotline.

WCW CONTRACT

A few years later, I was called again by WCW during the “Monday Night Wars.” It seemed that they had changed their minds about me and they were ready to offer me a real contract.

Come 1999, I flew to meet up with JJ Dillon and Kevin Sullivan in Atlanta. When I got to the Ramada Inn near the airport, someone showed me to the room where Kevin Sullivan was, but he wasn’t with JJ. He was in there with a bunch of guys that I never saw before. When Kevin saw me at the door, he quickly ushered me out of the room, hoping that the others hadn’t seen me.

“No, no, no!” Kevin said as we ran out of the room.

“Look, Sabu,” he said all nervously, pushing papers into my hands. “I need you to wait in this other room and just sign this contract as soon as possible.”

“What’s going on in there?” I asked, laughing a little at the top secret urgency that was going down, flipping through the pages he was pushing into my hands.

“I can’t really say, but I just can’t have them see you. It will mess everything up,” Kevin said, having my back. “Now, just sign that, and I will be back over in a little bit.”

Now, I had looked around the room, and the only person I even recognized in there besides Kevin Sullivan was Terry Taylor. I assumed that he was the guy Kevin was sheltering me from, but I really didn’t know for sure. I figured whatever it was, Kevin was looking out for my best interests. Maybe Terry was kayfabed from the contract offer and would have tried to kill it. I don’t know, but I followed Kevin’s lead.

“Thanks,” I said, shaking his hand.

Kevin stepped back out of the room. I sat back in my seat in whoever’s hotel room it was that he sat me in for shelter, and that is when I saw the biggest numbers in my life ever meant for me. They were offering 2.5 million for three years, not counting PPVs and rental cars. This was a game-changer; life-changing money. It was finally a dream-come-true deal for me. I wanted to tell my mother about it first, and then fully intended to sign in the morning.

The door opened.

“Did you sign it yet?” a frantic Kevin Sullivan said, entering the room.

“I will,” I said. “I just want to run it by someone first, but I’ll have it for you in the morning.”

“No, no, no!” he said. “Just sign it! Sign it now!”

Kevin rushed back out of the room.

The reason I didn’t sign it was that I really wanted to read the wording over with my mom who was good at that. I took the paperwork with me back to my hotel. I called her. I learned she had been having some serious health issues that needed addressing before going over it. I made those calls, then we went over the paperwork. It looked good!

I called WCW back maybe six hours later. I reached JJ Dillon and I told him, “Hey JJ. I’m signing it right now.”

“I’m sorry, Sabu. It’s too late” he said.

“Wait, too late?”

“We will be sued for tampering with a contract. I can’t have you sign it now,” he said. “Paul Heyman is threatening contract-tampering. He threatened us and TBS took the offer off the table.”

“But he breached a contract with me!” I said, not believing my ears. “He wasn’t paying me and broke our contract!”

“I’m sorry, Terry,” JJ said. “My hands are tied.”

Out of everything in my career, my one real regret is not signing that big contract with WCW the moment they put it in front of me. I should have just listened to Kevin.

The following year, WCW went out of business $60 million in debt. It would have been $61 if I had signed, and Time Warner would have paid it off in full!

I don’t really know what happened. I don’t see how Paul Heyman even knew I was talking with them. I guess I can only fathom the worst. Terry Taylor was the only guy I knew in that room, and he had to have stooged me out to ECW. Otherwise, it just doesn’t add up.

You may ask, “Why?” Well, I don’t exactly know, but I do know Terry was old school. He always tried to give me advice, but I never took it. Whenever Terry Taylor was around me in the past, he acted like he was above me and he acted like he should be teaching me. I had been around the business just as long as he did and I didn’t appreciate him treating me like a kid. I eventually had words with him on that talking down to me, and I think I hurt his ego.

Because of our talk, I think that he hated me and everything I stood for so much that he just wrecked my opportunity because he knew that he could. He was the only one in the room that I recognized. The rest didn’t know me. I don’t know for sure, but I really think it was him.

Unfortunately, I never got another contract opportunity like that again and now probably won’t.





KONNAN on SABU's ECW RETURN

I have to tell you, Sabu is one of the all-time most unique and creative gimmicks in the history of our business. He really is one of a kind. His fearlessness surpasses just about everyone who has stepped foot in the ring.

When I was in ECW, I finally met up with this guy "Sabu" who I had only heard things about before in whisperings. Once I saw him, I learned those whisperings were true. I wasn't the only one impressed with him, either.

When Paul called looking for some good Lucha stars to bring into his promotion, I showed up with Rey Mysterio and Psicosis (and later Juventud Guerrera,) who were all wrestling a different style and really taking the world by storm. They too are considered to be trailblazers in this industry today in their own rights and back then, they were quickly becoming considered among some of the most innovative wrestlers in the world at the time. However, whenever Sabu had a match in ECW, you could be sure that all four of us were watching. I remember often gathering up my Lucha brothers around a monitor, at the curtain, or even sneaking under the bleachers with them to see all the craziness that Sabu was up to. We rarely missed one of his matches, and we would just marvel at all the creative things Sabu would come always up with.

I remember when Paul had fired or suspended him because he had gone to Japan and missed a very important show. A lot of the boys in the back were hot about it so I think Paul had to appease them and at the same time set an example. The thing about it was Sabu was a big part of ECW's success, though, and needed to be there.

For the next few months, you could just feel his absence. At one point, I remember going up to Paul to tell him what I thought about the whole situation with the Sabu chants and signs that still were showing up, night after night.

I said, "Paulie, look out there. The people still want him."

"I know," he said. "But what can you do?"

"Yeah, he made a mistake," I said. "But don't deny the people what they really want."

I don't remember how much time passed after we had talked, but it wasn't long. It was probably only like one or two shows later. I was

standing backstage and Paul called me over to talk with him.

“Hey, Konnan,” he said. “Make sure you watch what I’m going to do tonight.”

“What’s that?” I asked.

“Just watch,” he said.

I had no clue what he was talking about, but anyway, he ended up doing that blackout spot where he turns off the lights and when he turns them back on somebody is in the ring.

He didn’t tell any of the boys in the back, but a bunch of us were watching when it happened. When the lights came back on . . .

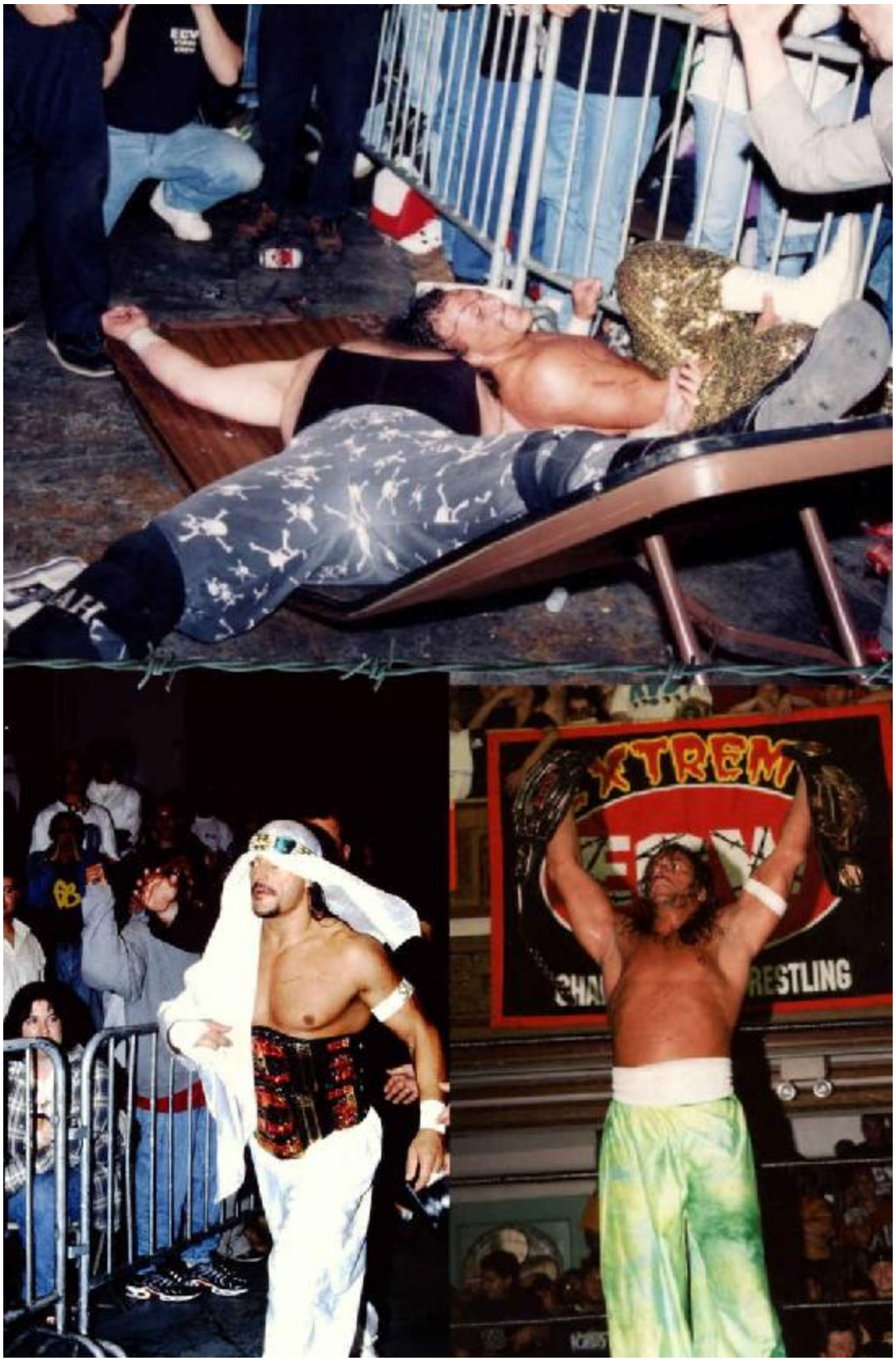
It was Sabu!

The place went ballistic.

Much respect to Sabu!

— ***Konnan***




XTREM
RESTLING

CHAPTER 11 – ECW RETURN

After leaving WCW land, I got a call from Paul Heyman. His voice was very slow and rehearsed, and I knew that something was up. He had been planning a big show for his 1995 *November to Remember*. I guess what had happened was the Pennsylvania State Athletic Commission was going to shut them down, and it was going to be more like a *November Nobody Would Remember.*

You see, on a recent show, Cactus Jack lit a chair on fire that was wrapped in a kerosene-soaked towel in the ring and went after Dreamer & Funk with it. During that spot, the flames started to grow some and moved up toward his hands as he swung it. He ultimately lost control and released the fiery weapon. It bounced off the top rope and took flight. The flaming chair and towel launched out into the audience and caused quite a scare for some of the fans in attendance. Terry Funk got burned badly in the process, as did a fan who sued. The commission did not like the idea of putting fans in danger. This incident, coupled with a few other extreme moments in ECW, led to some worries. Because of this, ECW was in danger of being shut down.

Paul Heyman knew that I pulled some weight with one of the commissioners in that state. He remembered that every time he was assigned to our shows, he would come over and hit me with all kinds of questions and ask for pictures with me, but really didn't do this with anyone else.

"I think it is because he is a big fan of my uncle," I said to Heyman. "I am not sure."

"I don't care if he wants to have your baby," he said. "If you can get him to let us have the show, you will be helping out all the boys, and you will be helping out me. I will owe you big time." I knew Heyman was swallowing his pride to make the call to me in the first place. I listened as he asked me to call the commissioner and to try to persuade him to let the show happen, under my watch.

Now, I agree, letting me be the guy in charge of "not allowing weapons to get out of hand" seemed a little ridiculous, but so was everything else in the business.

"So, will you give him a call? Paul asked.

I waited a few moments to make the bloated worm on the other end of the phone squirm like the greasy snake that he was. I knew that the show would mean a payday for the boys. I also knew that this call would help Paul out tremendously. But neither is the reason why I would do it. The only reason I would help is I knew that it meant I could hold him up for some good money for myself.

I really thought his plan was dumb. “There is no way that this was going to work,” I thought, but figured that there was at least a payday in it for me either way. Not having any steady work or any income, I agreed.

After making that call, it turned out that Paul Heyman was right! The commissioner was a very big fan of mine (because of my uncle) and agreed to let ECW run the show as long as I made sure stuff was done safely. He did, however, make the stipulation that I would be the only one able to use tables or chairs at this particular event so he “could see how things go.” Paul and I figured that things would end up going just fine for ECW in Pennsylvania again, just as long as there were no incidents when the others started slipping the hardcore crap back into their matches.

After the greenlight, I was booked to return to ECW on November 18, 1995, at *November to Remember.*

*S*hortly thereafter, I was introduced as a “mystery opponent” on an ECW card promoting the big event. The lights went out, then back on again and the fans went crazy for me. It was a really cool moment. I even got goosebumps while they screamed and cheered for me as their returning hero, and I usually don’t go for that sentimental shit.

So my second stint in ECW began. Come *November to Remember*, the ball started rolling in ECW and didn’t stop.

I beat Hack Myers around Thanksgiving. I beat Cactus Jack right after Christmas. Then, I beat Stevie Richards right after the New Years. In 1996, I worked with a lot of guys I really liked working with. Just before my pairing with RVD for our famous tag team run, I was working a lot against 2 Cold Scorpio.



2 COLD SCORPIO

People may not know this, but 2 Cold was tough as nails. He was by no means a pushover. He would always fight back and hold his own, and he could party with the best of them. When 2 Cold was in WCW, Ric Flair was just taking over the book again. He was finally going against some names like Ricky Steamboat who he really respected and watched on television before getting in the business. To get over with the boys, he rolled with them. 2 Cold told me about partying with Buddy Lee Parker & Brian Pillman and eventually taking the fall for it when Flair decided to make a power statement after he took control. See, for Flair to look like he was doing his job, he had to catch someone doing something wrong. What easier way to do that than to hit someone with a drug test who he knew was going to fail?

I guess there was an incident in the Bahamas as the story goes, and some partygoers ended up telling where they got their party supplies from the night before. Then, in the morning, 2 Cold ended up having to take a piss test.

“If I could have delayed the test for 48 hours, they wouldn’t find any coke in me,” he said in a recent interview. “But since it was just pot they were looking for, I would have had to delay that test for years and years with the amount I had in my system. So I just took it, failed it like crazy, and they had to let me go.”

Because Flair didn’t tell 2 Cold Scorpio himself that he was being let go, anger built. 2 Cold told everyone that it wasn’t right. He felt like he was singled out, and made it very clear that if he ever saw Ric Flair again, he was “going to whip his pussy ass.”

Later on, 2 Cold was back in NJPW, and they were doing a North Korean tour in conjunction with WCW called “Collision in Korea.” Ric Flair was also booked on it.

“Ric Flair is the one who got me fired from WCW,” 2 Cold told Masa Saito when he heard the news. “When I get a hold of him, I’m going to kick that motherfucker’s ass.”

“No Scorpio,” Masa said. “Don’t do that. If you try to do that, you will end up being fired from here, as well.”

2 Cold was disappointed, but agreed not to.

When the tour time finally came, guys like the Steiner Brothers, Scott Norton and whoever they were using at the time (with 2 Cold included) had to lock up their pills and everything else that could get them in trouble in their hotel lockers at Tokyo to go over to North Korea. If they didn’t, the strictness of the country would have done them in.

By the time they got to North Korea, some of the guys were going through withdrawals and others were just angry.

2 Cold was on a tour bus sitting next to Road Warrior Hawk waiting for the rest of the wrestlers. When all of a sudden, they looked up and there was Ric Flair.

Ric really lived the gimmick. He was standing on the sidewalk with the hair slicked back, looking at his Rolex, and waiting for his Mercedes to roll up. Hawk had been riding around in Ric’s limo for the past couple of days, but for whatever reason, decided to get in the bus with the boys when he didn’t see his fancy ride on that particular morning.

“Look, there’s Flair,” Hawk said, not knowing 2 Cold had heat with him. “I wonder what he is waiting for.”

“Yeah, I wonder,” 2 Cold said.

“Maybe he is looking for me,” Hawk said. “I rode with him the last couple of days. Maybe he wants me to ride with him again.”

“Fuck that motherfucker!” 2 Cold said. “Let him ride by himself.”

“What did you say?” Hawk asked. “What the fuck are you talking about?”

“Fuck that pussy. Let him ride by himself.”

Words were exchanged, and it is possible Hawk dropped an n-bomb or something on 2 Cold Scorpio. Whatever he said, that was all it took.

2 Cold jumped up on Hawk and started beating the hell out of him. He would not be disrespected. Now, Hawk was no pushover at all, but everyone said 2 Cold was beating that motherfucker’s ass in the middle of the bus. Some of the young boys tried to jump in to break it up, but 2 Cold just flung them off like they were nothing.

2 Cold Scorpio was destroying him! Hawk had professed to be a Hell’s Angel that could knock anybody out with one punch, but that wasn’t the

case with 2 Cold Scorpio. He hit him with everything he had in the face, and 2 Cold just shook it off and laughed, then went back to beating on Hawk. Just before he could gouge Hawk's eye out, the Japanese boys pulled 2 Cold off of him.

"It was a good thing, too," 2 Cold says telling the story today. "Hawk was bleeding like crazy and I was afraid that I could have caught hepatitis from him or some shit."

2 Cold Scorpio said he realized that he had fucked up. North Korea was finally letting Americans in again almost like a peace treaty, and then they hear this happened? Probably not a good thing. So, like a man, 2 Cold went up to each person on the bus and apologized, telling them that this was no place to doing this. However, when he went up to Hawk to try to apologize, he learned that Hawk was still fired up over it. He knew it wasn't over.

Later that night at the hotel, 2 Cold decided that he needed to get a good weapon together in case Hawk decided to get revenge. 2 Cold was rooming with Chris Benoit of all people, who was watching him forge something evil together. Benoit shook his head, looking at 2 Cold like he must have lost his mind. *2 Cold was making a shank out of two stainless steel chopsticks.*

"Please, please tell me that you will not be stabbing someone over here in North Korea," Chris said. "They have your passport and you will be stuck over here in North Korea. Now, if you do this shit in Tokyo, that's different."

"How so?" 2 Cold asked.

"I know enough mob motherfuckers that I can get you home," he said. "But please, just don't stab anyone in North Korea, okay?"

With Chris Benoit being the voice of reason, 2 Cold Scorpio agreed. He went out of his way to squash the heat with Hawk in the end and they cleared everything up by the time they returned to Tokyo.

ECW ALLIANCE WITH RVD

It only made sense that I was paired up with Rob Van Dam, right? This meant I could ride with him and also work with someone I was very

familiar with. We figured that this formula would make for great TV, and I think it's safe to say from looking at the response years later that it did.

It's funny because whenever I am asked about tagging with RVD, I tend to remember the matches we had and wrestling him a lot more than being his partner. I don't know if this is because of a lot of partying or what, but I guess it makes sense that you might barely even remember your partner, who was always standing on the apron, and that you would seemingly remember your opponents a whole lot better because there was more interaction.

For this program, we decided long term that I would first wrestle him in singles and then eventually team up with him. We decided to go with making the storyline about RVD not really respecting anyone, but eventually growing to respect me leading up to an eventual alliance.

We had some really great singles matches. Then, after the feud was over, Rob challenged the team of Doug Furnas and Phillip LaFon (aka Dan Kroffat) in their debut match with ECW. Rob told them that if they were going to "make it in ECW," they would first need to learn respect from the one man who could teach it to them.

"…He taught me the meaning of the word. My tag team partner tonight is *SABU*!"

And finally, the alliance between Rob Van Dam and Sabu was made.

In case you were hoping for some dirt on Doug Furnas, I can only really say this; Doug was stiff as shit! As far as LaFon is concerned, I found it amazing that he could get so fucked up every single night, then be ready to go like thirty to forty minutes in the ring the next day.

At around the same time, I also had matches against Chris Candido, who was always just excellent in the ring.

Most everyone drank the Kool-Aid that Paul was serving. It is a well-documented fact that Paul had everyone believing that ECW reflected a revolution that was going to make everyone in the locker room rich. We continued to work hard, raising the measuring stick more and more at every show, constantly trying to outdo ourselves every night. The hard work was paying off. We were getting higher ratings than ever, but in order to make it to the next level, Paul knew we needed to do something even bigger to get international exposure.

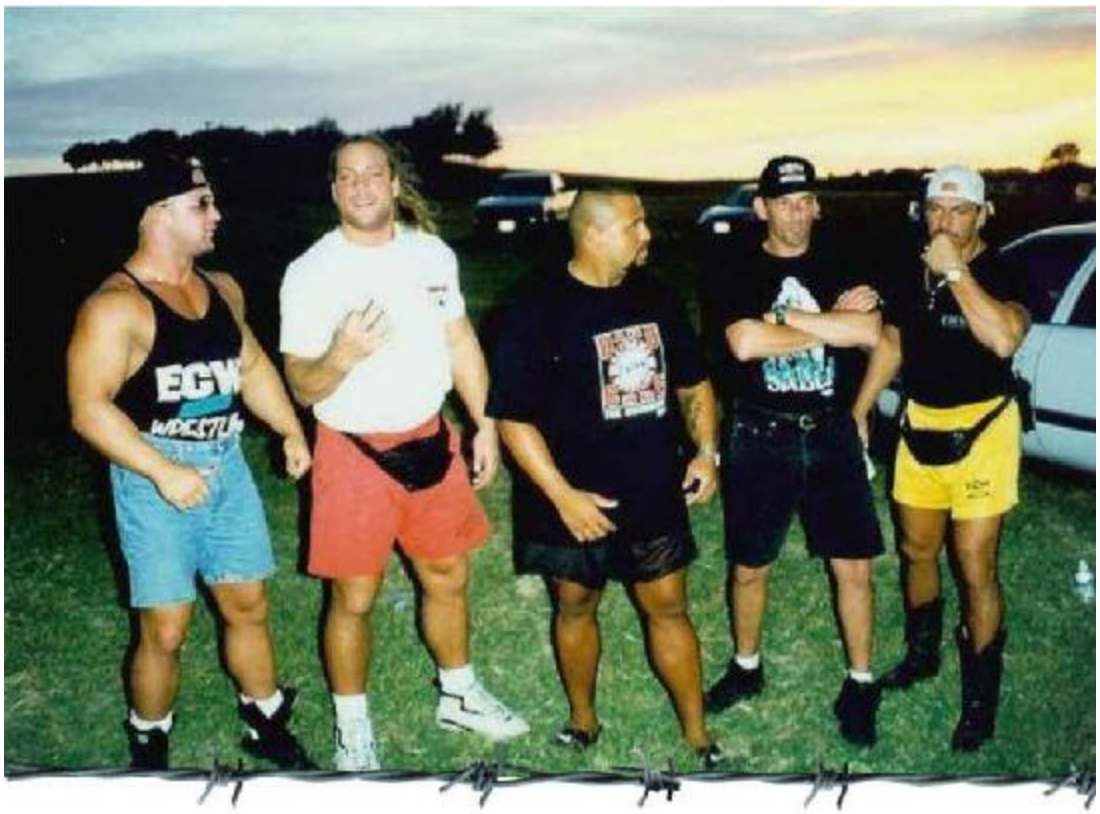
ELIMINATORS

Come November of 1996, RVD and I went on to feud with the ECW World Tag Team Champions, The Eliminators, John Kronus & Perry Saturn. At the time, magazines and dirtsheets alike loved this team. The Eliminators were considered by some to be the best tag team in America, and maybe even “the best in the world.” Since we were big attractions, Paul had Rob and I chase The Eliminators to give them that little-added push. But we didn’t need the belts, so we never quite managed to beat Kronus and Saturn.

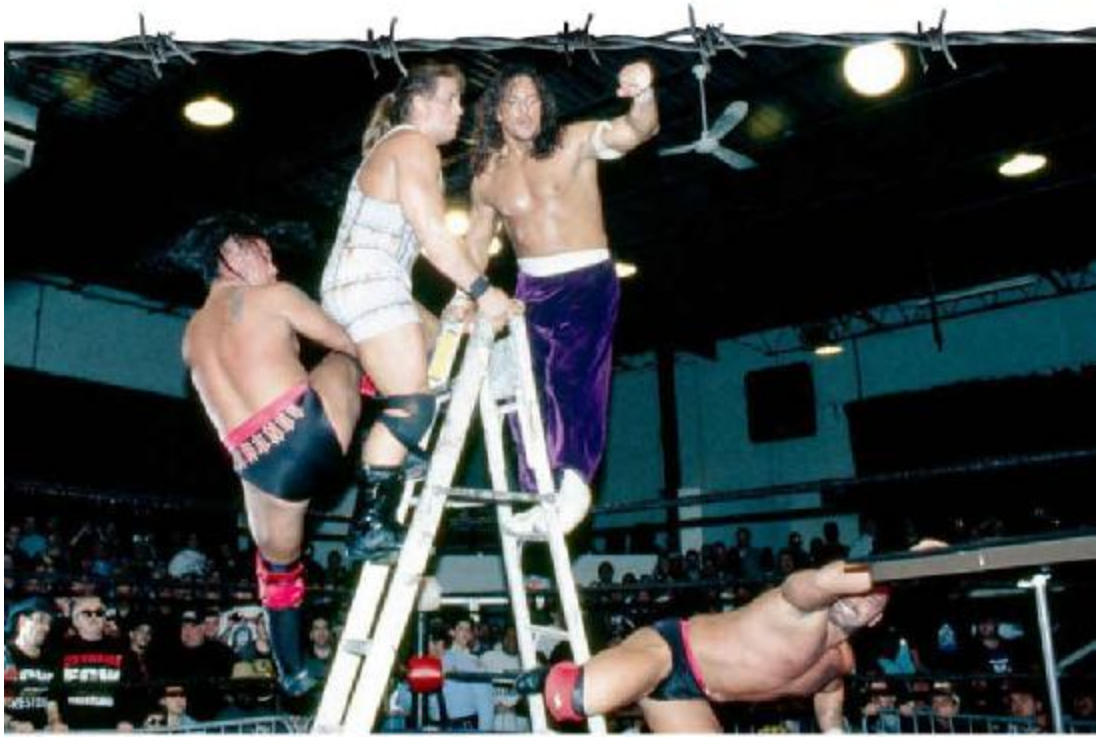
For being considered one of the best for a period of time, in my opinion, they were pretty average workers most of the time. While Perry was okay, I did actually have a little bit of a problem with Kronus. I don’t think it was his fault though. I think his parents were related. I mean, we sold everything they had to give us, but when Rob and I would hit Kronus with our trademark splash & leg drop combination, he wouldn’t stay down. He wouldn’t sell it or anything. Kronus would just get up like he was Superman sometimes.

After seeing Kronus no-sell our shit a handful of nights in a row, I decided that I would actually have to shoot with him a little to make him sell it like Saito taught me. It was nothing personal. He was just “half-special” for sure. So one time when Rob and I were hitting him with the Rolling Thunder combo, we laid it in so hard that I think we knocked him silly. I mean, it was so stiff that if he was “half-special” before, he was coming out of that match full-fledged mental. When Saturn saw that, he at least knew why we were doing it. Kronus, on the other hand, had no idea and charged me with red in his eyes. Perry Saturn had to break us up.

Perry came to me after the match to shake my hand, just like laughing, not even questioning the shoot on Kronus.



When the ECW boys got together, we would often do some pretty dumb stuff. Kronus on the other hand, was maybe a different kind of dumb.



“He is like legit slow, right?” I asked. “Like, he gets money from the state for being special?”

Perry Saturn himself was never a problem. He could shoot on you at times, but nothing too major. Most of the time he was fine to work with, but sometimes it was a little hard to maneuver him unless you outright told him exactly what he needed to go. He was wooden. Stiff. If I pushed him to send him into the ropes, he often didn’t realize what I was trying to get him to do, so he didn’t move. He was also a little hard to read sometimes, at least for me. Like, if you thought he was going to go one way, you were probably wrong, and he would go the other way. Shit like that. A really good worker was easy to read, worked well, and reacted when things went bad. At this time, Perry was good when you told what to do, but he wasn’t really polished enough to be a leader in the ring yet.

ECW INVADES WWF

Come February 1997, we were surprised when Paul came to the locker room and said that we were going to be working spots with the WWF. This seemed like a direct contradiction to some in looking at a lot of what he had been saying, but it made sense to me. The cross-promotion meant our brand and our guys were going to on their programming. This meant more exposure and more buys for us.

When ECW showed up to the WWE locker room, the mood backstage was tense, to say the least. ECW had been slamming the hell out of the WWF on the mic for many years practically every show. We called it cartoony. We called it garbage. We called it bullshit kid stuff. I think a lot of WWE people believed that there must have been some truth to the promos. Hell, I think even some of our own guys believed it.

On that night’s first RAW taping with ECW at the Manhattan Center, a dozen or more of our guys had been booked by Vince himself for matches on what was sure to be a historic night for diehard professional wrestling fans everywhere. Now, don’t get me wrong, promotions like NWA and AWA worked together for supercards, as did New Japan & All Japan. The

difference was here, Vince almost never talked about any other promotion than his own on his television product.

Paul wanted ECW to look like a big team invading the corporate promotion. He had custom tracksuits with the ECW logo on them made and we all showed up wearing our colors. While Vince was actually impressed with us looking more professional than perhaps he had expected, our presence did not impress everyone. The WWF boys were clearly not happy to see us. In an already competitive atmosphere, ECW guys, the same guys that shit on them week after week, were coming in and taking their spots on the show. We were taking a lot of WWF guys' television time away from them and they were pissed. Another reason they were pissed is probably because many of them had been somewhat worked into believing that these elements of an ECW invasion were actually real.

The build-up for the cross-promotion relationship had been in the works for some time with only a few people in on it. Rumor has it that Vince first reached out to Paul after the *King of the Ring PPV* was booked in Philadelphia in 1995. ECW had grown quite an impressive local following in their hometown, so much so that "ECW" chants sometimes stole the show. After that was when Paul Heyman started working on a deal with WWE behind closed curtains. Nobody knew. The idea was to work ECW into WWF storylines almost like an advertisement for our show. Paul wanted this national exposure, but never told his talent anything about it. From what people say now, I think the only people who knew about these negotiations were Paul, Vince, and maybe Bruce Prichard. Paul kept it all on a need-to-know basis so his talent would continue to live the "anti-corporation" message in their daily lives.

Maybe a year later, some of that ECW advertisement negotiation had moved forward, but neither Paul nor Vince told anybody. Both promoters agreed that to make the surprise really work, they were going to have to keep an air of realism to what was happening. If the secret had been leaked, it would have had far less impact in a fan base that was becoming more and more "smart" and internet savvy.

At the *WWF Mind Games* PPV, Dreamer and Sandman apparently "bought tickets" and sat ringside with Paul. They wear all wearing their ECW colors so everybody knew exactly who they were. Because of the secrecy of the angle, Paul actually had The Eliminators off camera way

back in the audience in case a real fight were to break out because Paul and Vince didn't smarten up the locker room. This was done to make the ECW guys think it was real, and also to serve as real back up in the event that WWF wrestlers decided to take matters into their own hands.

In the first match of the PPV, Savio Vega was just minding his own business, wrestling in a Caribbean Strap Match against Justin "Hawk" Bradshaw, when The Sandman took an opportune moment to jump out of his seat and spit a stream of beer at Savio. For anyone who knows Sandman, this totally could have been real, so it translated very well on the screen.

Eventually, I found out that only Savio Vega knew about the beer spot. The commentators didn't know, and even Bradshaw didn't know it was coming. Bradshaw has gone on the record to say that he was actually ready to hop the fence and fight if Savio hadn't cut him off. Vega played it off like it was just some fan getting out of line which added to the realism. Also, on television, the commentator team never mentioned who they were, or even ECW by name. This, even more, gave the incident an unscripted vibe.

Behind the scenes, the agents quickly got word and were beyond pissed! As the match continued, a handful of officials made their ways to ringside trying to stay off camera to resolve the issue. Tommy Dreamer says, "Jerry Brisco was furious! He was daring us to step over the rail so that he could have a go at us himself!"

There was some craziness with security, and eventually, the ECW guys were escorted out of the building by the actual police. In the WWF locker room, the other wrestlers wanted to kill us.

Then the next night on RAW, Owen Hart and British Bulldog were defending their tag team championship against Skip and Zip, the Bodydonnas. Then, out of nowhere, ECW chants broke out and Taz jumped over the steel barricade. He had a sign that read "SABU FEARS TAZ." In doing this, Taz actually injured a photographer legit, further adding question by the fans as to whether or not things could be real. Jim Ross never mentioned the ECW faction by name. He said it was just, "some local outfit that wrestles out of a bingo hall trying to get their fifteen minutes of fame."

The real purpose of these calculated incidents was to give ECW a worldwide commercial for their first ever pay-per-view, *ECW: Barely Legal*. This immediately became major buzz-talk among the smart fans and

even more for people who were unfamiliar with ECW altogether. Paul wanted the exposure to reach a wrestling audience that was unfamiliar with his product and have them ask themselves a few questions that may want them to purchase the pay-per-view. *What is ECW? Who is Sabu? Who is Taz? Why is Sabu afraid of this guy?*

In the end, it was smart, a great work, and the incidents made the dirt sheets think it was real. It created all kinds of talk between the fans and the professionals not in the know. Essentially, in hindsight, I think that Paul just paid for advertising time, and this is how they chose to do it.

You have to give WWE & ECW props. With WCW beating WWE with the nWo invasion angle, both promotions could only really benefit from this move, and they did.

Fast forward now to the Manhattan Center RAW taping. Jerry "The King" Lawler had a traceable history with Paul E Dangerously because they had both worked together in Memphis. Smart fans knew (or could easily find out) that they didn't get along and had a big falling out. So, Jerry was used as the catalyst to bring ECW to WWF to continue with this element of "realism."

A week or so before the invasion, Lawler cut a promo on WWF television touting his hatred towards Heyman and his bullshit promotion. He then challenged the ECW wrestlers to appear on RAW the following week, predicting they would suck and prove his point that there "was nothing behind all the hype."

Paul Heyman phoned into RAW and accepted the challenge for February 24, 1997, at the birthplace of Monday Night Raw. At the Manhattan Center the next week, ECW stars like The Dudley Boyz, The bWo, and Sandman all made appearances to compete in officially sanctioned WWF matches to put their money where their mouths were. Paul booked all his top names as exposure for the pay-per-view to introduce the trademark ECW extreme style to the WWE Universe. Paul Heyman even appeared on commentary to make sure his product was represented correctly.

I was booked for a run-in during the Taz versus Mikey Whipwreck match where I fucking fell. People still bust my balls about that slip as being a major "botch" to this very day.

During the match, I prepared for an aerial jump off the "R" in the *RAW* logo; three big painted wooden letters positioned above the entryway. The

plan was, just at the right time, I would climb up on top of the logo, and jump down off of the letters onto some “Team Taz” members who were a bunch of extras wearing Taz colors. Things didn’t go quite as planned. What happened was, before the show, I checked out the letters. By eyeballing where they were positioned, I told the production crew that I would just need a ladder behind the letter “R”, and everything would be just fine. So when that time of the night came for the spot, the ladder was right there waiting for me. Little did I know that it was a cheaply-made piece of shit.

As I test climbed up the ladder behind the “R” a little early, I rested my hands on the prop — and the whole thing fucking moved! I figured leapfrogging over the letter was a possibility, but not only would it look less impressive than jumping off it, but it was possible that I wouldn’t even clear the aisle. I quickly enlisted the help of the Dudleys backstage to both hold the ladder and stabilize the letter for my jump.

When my cue finally came, I raced to the top of the logo without a problem, but it just wouldn’t stay stable, no matter how hard they held it in place. When I got to the top and sprung off of it, it moved under my feet and fell behind me. I went straight down off the “R” barely touching anyone.



The famous ECW invasion botched jump off the top of the RAW logo (ABOVE). WWF later invades the ECW ring including "Mr. Monday Night" (BELOW).



My positioning was all off and the people below who were there to break my fall were not in the right place. I barely brushed one or two of the Team Taz members.

On one camera it looked good for a second, but on the other one, it looked even worse than the Sandman trying to wrestle. It was obvious; I barely hit one guy and the rest of them didn't know what to do so they all fell like dominos. With nobody there for me, the drop also knocked the fucking wind out of me. I was supposed to run to the ring for a face-off to tease our PPV, but I couldn't even breathe. I jogged to jump into the ring, but I was all blowing up and it was a big mess. Taz thought it was the funniest shit in the world.

It was shitty, I know, but I tried.

The only major ECW star that didn't show at this time was RVD. Rob's contract was either up, or almost up, and he was seriously thinking about leaving ECW at the time to going to WWE, so he wasn't involved.

After the ECW invasion show in February on RAW, a number of WWE stars made appearances on ECW shows. The biggest storyline there became Heyman versus Lawler, but didn't last. Egos clashed about who would win/lose and backstage agendas didn't jive. In the end, the arrangement between the two companies started to fall apart.

Before the WWE/ECW relationship dwindled altogether, Jerry Lawler decided to invade the ECW Arena himself accepting indy dates from Paul. He said ECW stood for "Extremely Crappy Wrestling" and basically dissed hardcore wrestling right at their home-base. Fans never expected him to show up there, and they practically rioted. Essentially, he was saying that everything to do with ECW was shitty. "This building should really be built out of toilet paper," he said. Lawler was set to headline a number of main event matches, including ones with Rob and me at ECW's Heat Wave and Hardcore Heaven.

On June 23, 1997, at a WWF RAW taping, I was wrestling Flash Funk (2 Cold Scorpio) in a match that ended outside the ring in a double count out. After the match, I went to put Flash Funk through a table, but the table didn't break. I don't know why, but I knew I needed to do something to save the spot. So, I defaulted on a trick that I had done a number of times when this had happened in the past. I went crazy and jumped into the

crowd. I started pushing people out of their seats and throwing chairs into the ring at 2 Cold. The agents immediately followed my lead and sent security out to take me away.

Dirt sheets like *The Torch* and *The Observer* all reported at the *Monday Night Raw* taping on 6/23/97: “Rob Van Dam and Sabu weren’t happy with what WWF creative had booked for them.” I mean this is mostly true, but some of it was also Paul not wanting his brand to look weak yet, because once this happened, they wouldn’t be considered a threat any longer. He wanted me to beat Flash Funk clean, and he also didn’t like the idea of RVD putting over Jesse James Armstrong, aka Road Dogg. (I don’t think this match even ended up happening.) The idea behind that was “our top guy shouldn’t come in and lose to one of WWF’s mid card guys who was mostly losing all of his matches at that time.” Made sense to me.

If all had worked out correctly, the plan was to have an ECW match on RAW each week that would build up to a headline “ECW vs WWF” match at *SummerSlam*. The talk was that Team ECW would be Tommy Dreamer and Sandman taking on WWF’s Jerry Lawler, aligning himself with the ECW turncoat, Rob Van Dam. In return, ECW would get plugs in for our second pay-per-view, *Hardcore Heaven*. However, politics and egos eventually broke down the relationship. That Flash Funk match was among the last of the ECW invasion that WWF fans would see on RAW.

By July 19, 1997, ECW ran an experimental iPPV. (Rather than a PPV on television, people could pay to see it on the internet.) We were pretty much off of WWF programming, but Paul was still finishing up some of the initial storylines from the invasion angle. It was RVD, myself and Jerry Lawler versus Tommy Dreamer, Sandman and Rick Rude in a steel cage.

To politically keep everyone happy, it ended in a no contest. That was the end of the inter-promotional crossover.


SHIP WRESTLING
PUNK

NO ROPES, BARBED WIRE MATCH WITH TERRY FUNK

Recently, the play-by-play voice of ECW, Joey Styles, was a guest on Stone Cold Steve Austin's podcast. When Steve shifted gears to get some good ECW memories out of Styles, he asked him, "Since you probably saw a bunch of fucked up shit doing play-by-play for ECW, what was the most fucked up shit you ever saw?

Without hesitation, Styles immediately said, "Sabu versus Terry Funk in a barbed wire match for the ECW World Title."

Thank you, Joey. That means a lot to me. (I think!)

One of my most remembered matches in ECW was a barbwire match with Terry Funk at ECW's *Born to be Wired*, on August 9, 1997. This match even promised fans that it was going to be "too extreme for ECW." Because WWF was dabbling in some hardcore type matches now, Paul wanted to bring a little of the FMW craziness to America to really put his promotion over the top.

Now, back in 1993, I held the ECW World Title for a short time after beating Shane Douglas. Four years later, Terry Funk was now on the opposite side of the ring putting that same strap up for grabs in this barbed wire match for the title.

Terry Funk was great. He was always up for anything. Being a wrestler who was in his prime some twenty years before some of the guys on our roster, he didn't always understand the names of the all of the new moves, or much less how to do/take them. However, all you would have to do is talk slow and be really descriptive, and the Funker would be in.

ECW fans were a rare breed. You couldn't fool them worth a shit. Trying to really give the hardcore wrestling fans a taste of Japan, we both knew we were not going to be able to fake it. So for the actual barbed wire, people ask me all the time if it was gimmicked up. The answer is no! We didn't want to risk our credibility. The ECW crew didn't clip the sharp barbs off the barbed wire. We also didn't use special Hollywood rubber barbed wire, which is often used as a prop for movies. *That shit was real.*

Something else that was real, too: a real crazy-ass 53-year-old man wanting to whoop my ass on the other side of the ring.

In front of the bloodthirsty crowd at the ECW Arena in South Philadelphia, I had Terry kick my ass as hard as he could. He started by

giving me a generous piledriver that somehow didn't kill me, then whipped me into the disturbing lack of ropes to be the first to feel the barbed wire. Then, he picked me up and dropped me nuts-first on top rope of barbed wire. After that, Terry hit the barbed wire for the first time. This went back and forth until I locked Funk up by tangling his shirt in the wire for destroying a perfectly good pair of MC Hammer pants.

After a few steel chair shots and my "Air Sabu," which is a running jump onto a chair then a springboard into my opponent in the corner. At this point, we were already a bloody mess. When I tried it again, I overshot the jump by just a tiny bit and a section of wire filleted my arm like a catfish.

Joey Styles was legit grossed out. He told me later on that his stomach dropped as he yelled, "Oh my God! Sabu's bicep just got ripped open! Disgusting!"

It may have looked bad to some, and that's because it was.

"Fonzie!" I yelled at my manager.

His eyes looked at mine, then down at my arm. Then his eyes bugged out of his head.

"Go get me some tape!"

He snapped to. The former WWF referee disappeared down the aisle. I looked down at my arm. There was a big skin flap where my bicep was supposed to be that looked like a shark gill. Huge, thick corn syrup-like snots were dripping off my elbow to the mat. The referee leaned over to see if I was okay.

"Do we stop it?"

"Fuck no."

Stopping the bleeding would be great, but stopping the match was out of the question.

I can't describe it. If you are a real professional wrestler, you continue no matter what. You don't think about what kind of long-term repercussions something has. The show comes first. You fuel yourself with the last bit of adrenaline you have left, and you power through it.

My forearm tingled. It felt hot and cold around the wound at the same time and was heavy as hell. The canvas quickly looked like a butcher's shop floor.

"Sabu!"

Thank god for Fonzie. He knew the deal. He went right to the back and returned with some fresh tape as fast as he could.

Frantically wrapping duct tape around my severed arm, I was helped up off of the mat by the kind Southern gentlemen, only to be dumped onto steel chair courtesy of a Funkin' neck-breaker. Relentless, to say the fucking least. While I was still wrapping my arm, Funk was doing moves on me. As I hit the mat, I was still wrapping the tape around myself.

We then started whipping the dogshit out of each other with strands of the barbed wire which incidentally felt like fish hooks under your skin. I had about enough and started thinking about taking it home. I wrapped Terry Funk in a shit ton of barbed wire, put him on a wooden table at ringside as we had planned, and then hit him with a running leg drop from the ring apron through the table. I threw Terry's dead ass back in the ring for the pin.

Then, the crazy motherfucker decides to rib me and kicks out.

"What the fuck?!" I said laughing. "Okay, you asshole." I dragged Funk back outside the ring and put him back on another wooden table to do it again. He looked up at me and laughed as I was cursing under my breath. Then, I ran to the other side of the ring and looked for a strand of wire I could use to wrap around my leg. There was only a massive tangled net on the floor of what had once been hanging on that side for ropes.

"Fuck it," I said.

I pulled the whole thing back up to the mat. I bent it around my ass and what was left of my sweet Hammer pants. The results looked like a hula skirt of barbed wire, which was good enough for me. I hit the Funker with a barbed wire leg drop through a table again, who was still covered in his own barbed wire cocoon from the first time.

Then, it was all barbed wire bondage. We were totally tangled in the menacing metal mesh and could barely move. I threw Terry back in the ring and he kicked out again like the asshole that he was. But then, the gnarly netting got so bad, we were stuck together like Siamese twins and there was no separating us.

Imagine that — bondage with Terry Funk. Other than a rat, who would have thunk it?

I pinned him again and that was it.

Finally, I won my first ever world heavyweight championship – The ECW Heavyweight Title.

The loops of barbed wire were so imprisoning that we couldn't go on if we wanted to. The ref couldn't raise my hand if he wanted to either, because were pinned to the mat inside a big ball barb and couldn't even stand up. My pants were ripped entirely open at this point, and lifting up stuck in a loop far above my head. It looked like I wasn't wearing any pants and lifting up a blanket of torn cloth to give the front row a show, but I couldn't help it.

Fonzie came in the ring with wire clippers and started to go to work. The sharp barbs ripped at his shirt too until it was gone. After that, it finally ended with even more ring attendants having to literally pull us apart with scissors, metal cutters, the jaws of life and whatever other damned things they could find to desperately try to get us untangled from the metal mess.

Soon after that match in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida was "Hardcore Heaven '97," our second ever PPV. I lost the ECW Heavyweight title to Shane Douglas in a three-way dance with Terry, but it didn't matter. That match is the one everyone still remembers to this very day.

WORKING WITH TAZ

Ever since I had come back to ECW, Taz wanted to work with me. We had always been competitive, and I had heard that he talked some shit about me being selfish and leaving the promotion. So when Taz requested that we work my "leaving for New Japan" into a shoot storyline and for him to work a program with me, I said "no way" out of spite.

In typical old-school promoter fashion, Paul loved the idea of working this real, behind-the-scenes heat into a realistic storyline that could make everyone some money. (You have seen it before, like in the famous Shawn Michaels and Bret Hart booking.) Since Paul knew he could eventually convince me to do it somewhere down the road, he gave Taz the greenlight to continuously call me out with no real plans for a pay off, and egg me on during his promos at shows.

What made this angle look so real was *it was real!* Taz was speaking from the heart, somewhat. He made the argument that I left a major match on the table to go to New Japan. I was selling out to the fans, and being selfish because that match was for the tag team straps and he was my partner at the time. It was all true, but fuck him.

When he first started his crap, I would just listen to his bullshit at the curtain and shake my head. He became obsessed with the idea. He went on and on burying me, but I didn't give a shit what he was saying. After a few weeks of that horseshit, I wouldn't even bother to come out of the dressing room to hear it. I'd go take a big shit.

He can call me out all he wants. It is not going to work.

Anyhow, it only took three months of this bullshit before Paul finally talked me into eventually working with him. What happened was, I just gave up and agreed. We decided to build it up forever to really do it right. This was good because, in the meantime, it would create anticipation, and also it meant that I didn't have to interact with him.

On Taz's part, the shoot idea was smart. Fans bought into the realism of what he had to say. As a result, this angle actually made him what he became. Originally, he had a shitty cartoony gimmick that looked like a welfare Captain Caveman. But with all the shit-talking, he became more confident and developed a much better pissed off, no-nonsense character. He went from being "Taz, the Fred Flintstone Meme" to the "Taz, the Human Suplex Machine."



My former tag team partner, The Tazmaniac, had shortened his name to just “Taz” while I was gone. It made perfect sense to shorten his long name because his short ass was only three apples high to begin with. The new short-tempered Taz continued to publicly challenge me every chance he got, with me never coming out to address it.

After a year of call-outs and insults from Taz, we set up a big grudge match at ECW's first pay-per-view, *Barely Legal*, in April of ‘97. For this super grudge match against Taz, it was the first time we had worked against each other since my debut in ECW. Both of us had grown significantly since then. We were both more skilled, more experienced, and better performers all around.

“There are no long buildups like this today in wrestling. The timing was just right when the match finally happened,” said Kevin Sullivan in an interview for this book. “In my opinion, if they had waited even just a little bit longer, it would have been too long and nobody would have cared. Now, that’s patience and shows the genius that Paul is.”

It was an epic. In the end, Taz locked his Tazmission on me for the win. The Tazmission was something Taz created to look tougher. All in all, it was essentially a chokehold, which would have been an illegal move by the book in WWF, WCW, or even New Japan, but not in ECW. That is why it was perfect for this promotion and for Taz.

In hindsight, Taz and Paul were right. The crowd was extremely hot for the match. In a day and age where WWF completely blew off storylines from PPV to PPV, this led to some really cool storytelling and character development. Keeping our hands off of each other for a full year was unheard of in the wrestling world. The fans couldn’t wait to see us go at it, and this fueled our match even more.

After the big match, I joined Rob Van Dam in an alliance with Bill Alfonso. Taz and I, however, continued to work with each other for the rest of our time in ECW. He became a great foil for me there. When Shane was out on injury and couldn’t defend, Paul had Taz defend a custom FTW title belt on shows. Eventually, he dropped it to me.

Taz was funny with promos though. For someone who sure could give it, he sure didn’t like to take it. After hitting me with all of that bullshit on the mic for like a full fucking year, he would sometimes take stuff personally when Rob or Fonzie would talk about him in promos. The rule of thumb in

ECW on the mic was always “anything goes.” All is fair in the ring. If we ever argued in the ring on the mics, he would call me a “scarred freak,” or worse, but the moment you called him short, fat, or lazy, he would lose his shit and you would hear about it in the locker room. So, we had to be careful and creative on how to diss him in interviews, is all.

Besides all that, you really have to give Taz huge props for how much he has accomplished. Taz just grew and grew. After ECW, he went over to New York and crushed it as a commentator in WWE and later TNA. Then, he parlayed that experience into a radio show for CBS! He really was a perfect foil for me, and I’m happy to have had what fans call “one of the best feuds ever” with him. Continue to FTW Taz.





ECW HARDCORE WRESTLING®

Rob VanDam & Sabu™

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NEW JACK

New Jack was another crazy fucking bastard running around in ECW.

I remember one time, New Jack was coming into a venue and there was a big line there. One of the fans said something questionable to Jack, and he seemingly shrugged it off but he didn't forget.

Maybe a half-hour later, Jack went out and found the guy who had some choice words for one half of The Gangstas. He pretended to forget who the fan was and acted like he found "a random fan" to come into the locker room for a spot. To show you how devious New Jack was, he was actually working the fan the whole time in secret, though. He was just pretending to befriend the guy to mess with him because he suspected him of being racist.

This particular venue had a section blocked off for a hard cam and some board operators from the production crew where there working in it. That was about it. Jack brought the fan up to that area to talk to him.

"Hey, my man," Jack said, patting the fan on the back of his Metallica tour t-shirt. "I want you to sit up here in the VIP section, and I'm going to work you into a spot on the show."

"Really?!"

"That work for you?"

"Sure! Thanks, New Jack!" he replied. "Well, what do you need me to do?"

"Just sit up here, and when we come up, I'll tell you. Sound good?"

"Sounds good."

The gullible fan took the bait, and all the while New Jack was rubbing his hands together in his mind like a maniacal evil villain.

Today, more than ever before, fans like to be part of the show. They long for signs and love starting ridiculous chants. Being involved in a wrestling spot would really be a treat for many.

When the time finally came, it was in a match with me. New Jack went right over to where the alleged racist fan was, and he attempted to knock the guy right off the balcony. The fan held on for dear life. I had to actually pull New Jack off him from bumping the fan off the highest point in the balcony.

New Jack throttled the kid and chased him down the stairs. He caught him and beat him up in a backstage area during the match for no reason.

Trying to help the poor guy out, I rushed to catch up to them. Then, I saw the kid go flying down some stairs into a big belly flop onto the cement. New Jack was kicking, punching, and pushing him all the way through the cheap seats to the back of the arena and out the back door.

Everyone all the while thought the fan was part of the show and the spot was a work.

It wasn't.

New Jack was a heat-seeking missile. I remember one time Tracy Smothers came into the locker room looking for him desperately. I had no idea what the heat was about, so I asked.

"What's up?"

"I want to get New Jack," he said. "But I need your hands."

"My hands?"

"Yeah. Can you grab me that bag over there?"

"Okay," I said. I stepped over the locker bench and picked it up. Then, I walked back over to Tracy and went to hand it to him. "Here you go." I tried, and he refused it. I tried again, and he kind of pushed it into my chest.

"Can you just hold it right here? I'm going to go get New Jack, and then I need you to hand it to me when we come around the corner.

I shrugged. "Why the bag?"

"I'll be right back," Tracy said.

As I was waiting there not knowing even really what for, I got suspicious and looked in the bag.

Oh, shit! He has a gun in there. No way!

The most famous memory of many of New Jack being a crazy bastard took place on November 23, 1996, in Revere, Massachusetts. The Gangstas were booked against D-Von Dudley and Axl Rotten, but Axl never made it to the show because something happened to his grandmother. Rotten was replaced with a local kid named "Mass Transit" Eric Kulas.

Apparently, Kulas was an untrained fast-talker who was trying to sneak his way into the business. First off, he told Paul Heyman that he was 23 when he was in reality only 17. He also convinced the ECW booker that he had been trained by veteran wrestler Killer Kowalski, when the only real

experience he had was jumping around, doing piledrivers on a friend’s trampoline in his backyard.

Being the mark that he was, Kulas requested that New Jack “blade” him during the match. I guess he would feel honored by the experience, but when the match finally came, what he got in return was more like a lobotomy.

When the color spot came along, it is quite possible that New Jack, sensing the kid was full of shit, decided to take some liberties to teach the kid a lesson. If it was, in fact, not intentional, either way, the incision was made incorrectly and caused excessive bleeding. Blood was everywhere. It looked like someone had just cleaned a deer in the ring.

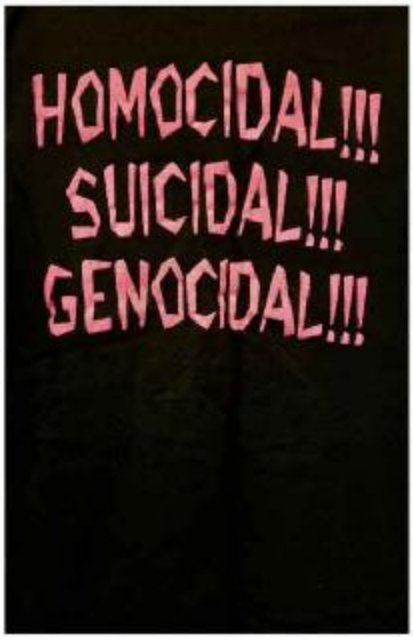
Immediately following the match, Kulas was hospitalized. He needed 50 stitches to stop the bleeding. The next day, New Jack was picked up by the police and charged with aggravated assault. Eventually, he was acquitted claiming the incident was an unfortunate accident.

Later on, in July of 1998, Kulas tried to sue New Jack and ECW but he ost the case.

Eric Kulas passed away on May 12, 2002. He was only 22-years-old. It had nothing to do with the injury to the forehead and more what was going on inside his head. Eric ended up succumbing to complications from gastric bypass surgery.

Later on, Kulas' parents tried to sue New Jack unsuccessfully. They argued that their son's death was caused due to a severe case of depression that he suffered, plus a major eating disorder, and both came immediately after what New Jack did to him.





The above ECW t-shirt design either had a misspelled word, or was a rib from Taz who was in charge of merchandise at the time it was made. I don't know. You decide.



CHRIS CANDIDO

My good friend Chris Candido passed away in 2005. Chris made appearances all over the world with major wrestling promotions such as ECW, New Japan, TNA Wrestling, Smoky Mountain Wrestling, and WCW. He was most widely known for his time in the World Wrestling Federation as Skip, one-half of the tag team, The Bodydonnas. For most of his career, however, he was right alongside his real-life partner, Tammy “Sunny” Sytch. She was his high school sweetheart whom he married, and she would go on to portray his manager quite a bit in the ring.

When I first met Chris, I was still in the Memphis territory. He was brand new, but he had already been around the business for a long time. Candido was the grandson of “Popeye” Chuck Richards, who was a wrestler for Vince McMahon Sr.’s WWWF (which was what it was called before it changed its name to the WWF in 1979.) At 14-years-old, he trained at Larry Sharpe’s Monster Factory and then went on to work for Sharpe's World Wrestling Association. Chris started out doing odd jobs for that promotion, including collecting ring gear during shows at ringside and driving vets like Moondog Spot to the airport. Larry even had him wrestle some small spots on his shows.

At a Memphis show is where I first crossed paths with Chris. He came in for a few weeks while Eric Embry was booking in a time when Jerry Lawler had his hands full with something else. Chris was still learning his way, so Eric had him wrestle as a babyface, which made sense on paper because of his look; a clean-cut, good-looking blond kid with blue eyes. However, that look never really worked for him. Chris Candido was a natural heel.

On a few shows, Chris stayed in our hotel room, which was jam-packed with Rob, Dredd, me and maybe someone else. What we would often do is take the mattresses off of the box springs and spread everything out so nobody had to crash on the bare floor.

I remember one night before a show, I was just starting to do some of my Middle Eastern gimmick, but I didn’t have any pants yet. I had gone shopping at the thrift store and found some pretty silky pregnancy pants in

the woman section that had a nice stretchy waistband. To get that genie pants-look, I pushed the legs up my calf a bit and duct taped them tight. Riding higher than my ankles, it gave just the illusion I wanted after pulling some of the slack down and free. It was perfect.

Chris walked in and saw me checking out my legs in the mirror.

"What do you think?" I asked looking at his reflection over my shoulder in the mirror. "It seems to work."

"Very sexy," Chris said. "Where did you get those?"

"Salvation Army. Maternity section."

Chris nodded, before laughing his ass off. He thought it was a riot.

Chris also thought it was funny that a skinny guy like me was bossing around this giant guy Judge Dredd who was just enormous in comparison. The reason for this was my uncle and I were still kind of training him, and Dredd was doing all kinds of really green stuff that pissed me off at the time that needed to be corrected.

Soon after that Memphis tour, I got booked on that first FMW tour by default. Onita asked my uncle if he knew anyone who looked like Kevin Sullivan who could fill in for him. We suggested Chris and that is how Onita ended up bringing Chris in, too.

"Hey Chris, do you have a passport?"

"No," he said on the other side of the phone.

"Well, you better get one. I got you booked in Japan!"

"..."

"Hello? *Chris?*"

Chris was absolutely psyched to go to Japan, and it absolutely helped kick-start his career, just as it did mine. Chris was really new, but they had no idea over there. He had that American look that they loved.

On his very first show, he was nervous as hell. We got to the building and Chris was already ahead of me. He was standing, staring at a paper on the wall and looking at the card in disbelief. He was right at the top. They were throwing him right into the main event match with the FMW owner himself, Onita. He was also really nervous that he was going to be working in a street fight. My uncle came over to help unnerve him.

"Toughen up," he said. "Don't let them see you sweat."

Chris Candido looked at my uncle for a minute, then back at the card. "A street fight? In Japan?"

“Look, there’s nothing to worry about,” he said. “This one will basically be very easy though. It’s with Onita.”

My uncle was right. When the match finally came off, Chris and Onita pretty much just ran around the arena holding each other‘s heads and pushing each other into objects.

Onita also insisted on having Candido’s face painted for the entire tour, which is also something else he hadn’t done before. I think he wanted this done probably so the fans could not easily tell that it was not Kevin Sullivan in the ring if they didn’t already know. I’m not really sure, but that was the deal. Some nights we painted a lightning bolt on Chris’s face, and other nights just whatever we could think of. One night, Big Titan (the Fake Razor) painted a Batman symbol on him.

As I said before, it was in that first tour that I got the big scars that many people know me for. I was set to wrestle in a few barbed wire matches, and we had run out of good razors that I could get color with. Chris was rooming with me and somehow managed to get a really long blade off of the hotel’s maid service. So what I ended up having to do was taking that free razor and chop it up good into small pieces.

I was worried during the match that it was not going to cut me, so I pushed it in extra hard. I thought it wasn’t cutting when it actually was. Because I did not know that it was digging in me as deep as it actually was, I was pushing it in even deeper. Backstage, I was bleeding like a stuck pig, but I still had to do a run-in, so I just taped it up.

“Disgusting,” Chris said. “There’s all kinds of white shit falling out.

I turned to wipe some on him before his match, and he ran away from me.

“Ew! Get away!”

Just before my run in, I pulled the tape off the big gash so you could see the blood and wrapped some barbed wire around me instead. Then, I ran to the ring. First off, I bumped Horace Hogan, and then I went to bump Chris. However, when he saw me a bloody mess coming at him with the wire all over me, Chris started running again.

He ran away as fast and as far as he could away from me until he was in the back passed the curtain. That didn’t stop the running. I continued to chase him down the hall until he locked himself in a dressing room.

The biggest, deepest wound on my chest was a mess. I squirt glue on it, taped it back together, and went back to the hotel with Chris later that night. When I got out of the shower, he heard me screaming. He came running in as I taking the tape off in the mirror to have a look at it.

“Dude, leave the tape on it!”

It looked like there was all this Styrofoam shit falling out of my body. He helped me push the Styrofoam back in and we put fresh tape on it. That seemed to work, but a few minutes later, I was calling for his help again. There was no way I could tape up the other big cut on my back.

“What’s up?”

“Can you come put some tape on my back real quick?” I asked. I dropped my towel to the floor.

“Ugh,” he said. “Okay. Sure, brother.”

Chris grimaced. There was now blood virtually everywhere. It looked like fucking *Hellraiser*. I pointed at the small of my back this time right above the crack of my ass.

“Aw, man,” he squinted looking away at the horror show. “What the fuck?”

“Yeah, I know. I know,” I laughed, not knowing if he was responding to the blood, my ass crack, or both. “Can you just put some little lines of glue on both sides, then run the tape right over it?”

“Okay,” he said. He wiped the cut again with some paper towels first and then dropped them in the can.

“How does it look?” I asked.

“Your ass, or the cut?”

I laughed.

“Well,” he said. “If you mean the cut, I think I can see the top of your kidneys just under the blood.”

Chris was the best.

It is funny, though, because the same sink where Chris performed the medical procedure was the same sink where we prepared our meals. The next morning, we put the hot water on full blast to warm up our Dinty Moore Stew.

Injuries and Chris went hand in hand. Another time later, we were at the Revere Dog Track near Boston. It was RVD & myself versus Chris Candido & Lance Storm. Towards the end of the match, we went for the finish. It

was our Rolling Thunder; somersault splash from Rob and a slingshot legdrop into the ring from me at the same time. However, on my way into the ring to hit my part of the move, my toe got caught on the rope!

Now, normally this wouldn't have been so bad. At most, I might have landed on his head, which would have been funny because he was so used to it. But, in this case, I more undershot the move and my boot grazed the side of his head. The problem with it this time was I had my spike in the laces of my boot and the spike hit him perfectly in the ear.

His ear exploded. There was blood everywhere. Chris did the Terry Funk flop, bugging his body around like a fish out of water. Tammy's face bobbed up over the dog racing track wall. Her eyes were bugging out of her head.

Lance Storm, aka Mister Personality, bent over and asked, "What's wrong?"

"Oh, nothing, Lance," Chris replied. "I just think my ear is falling off my head!" When Chris got to the back, a number of guys with EMT printed on their shirts surrounded him. Before I could even say, "I am sorry," Balls Mahoney came running out of nowhere. He had fresh juice still pouring out of his own head from a match, but that's okay because he was already drinking a beer to replenish his fluids. He grabbed a few of the EMTs and started throwing them off of Chris, thinking the EMTs were fake extras from the show.

"Get away from my friend!" he said, sounding like Frankenstein.

RAVEN

Raven wrestled with everyone, and for everyone, just about everywhere. The funny thing is, in ECW, he never really wrestled with me.

That's right, members of his flock worked with me, but never Raven.

Raven was just awesome. He could wrestle, talk, book matches, run the locker room. He was great. He could also party with the best of us.

On Konnan's podcast, "Keepin' it 100," he very much affectionately calls Raven "The King of the Rats." If you are wondering why he had such a title given to him, here's why:

Raven tells a funny story now about getting caught red-handed by Konnan late one night with a disgusting rat. I guess he got really fucked up and had his beer goggles on when he came across the ugliest woman in the hotel bar, or perhaps the ugliest woman any of them had ever seen!

Since there were no other real options, Raven threw her some game, and she took the bait.

As he was getting on the elevator to bring the wench back to his hotel room, the doors opened. Low and behold, there was Konnan.

“She was just beyond hideous,” Konnan says.

When they stepped in the elevator, a sense of shame fell over Raven. Neither Konnan nor Raven spoke a word. They just waited there staring at the wall as the elevator gage showed each passing floor. They didn’t say anything to each other, even though Raven knew he would hear about it in the morning, as well as he did some fifteen years later, and still to this very day.

“He was the one person I did not want to see getting in the elevator at three in the morning with this troll,” Raven says today. “In fact, ‘troll’ is not the right word. Comparing her to a troll would not be fair to trolls.”

Another Raven party story goes like this… It was late at night. We were all booked on a show in Florida. It was over and we were in party mode. I was already drinking in a room with Raven when Fonzie and “John” Alfonso (his friend from Boston) rolled in. Raven and I had already polished off a twelve-pack, I think, and about ready to call it a night.

“Guys, we gotta help Chris!”

We followed them out of the room and rushed out into the hall.

Chris Candido was lying on the floor just off to the side of the elevator with a bloody nose. He had no pants on. He was passed out and holding onto a pink piece of paper. You could see his bare ass.

We looked at the paper. It was a $150 ticket for indecent exposure from the Fort Lauderdale police.

“What do we do, daddy?” Alfonso asked.

“Well, we can’t leave him out here with no pants on,” Raven said, being the voice of reason. “The police will arrest him. Grab his feet, Sabu.”

“What are we going to do?” I asked.

“Oh, we have to help this poor motherfucker out,” Raven said. “It is our duty as brothers in the family of professional wrestling.”

“Where do we go with him?” I asked

“Which room is he in?” Raven asked. “Does anybody know?”

“ . . . ”

Nobody knew.

“Fonzie, he’s getting heavy,” Raven said trying to hold up his upper torso. “Go downstairs and get a luggage cart.”

Now, we were so fucked up that it didn’t even dawn on us that Chris could have just stayed in one of our rooms with us. It also didn’t dawn on us that we could have given him a pair of shorts or something to wear. So what did we do?

It was simple.

Raven and I rolled Candido’s naked juicy ass up in a carpet that we stole from the room and put him on a luggage cart.

When Chris woke up the next day, he couldn’t remember a thing. He was in a guest room at Hack Meyer’s house with the ticket for indecent exposure on the pillow next to him. Now, he had no idea where he was, but he did know something was missing, and I don’t mean just his pants.

No Tammy.

Immediately, Chris imagined the worst. He saw the ticket and panicked.

“She’s in trouble!”

Chris ran out of the room and right through the living room at Hack’s place. Hack’s parents from Mississippi had also apparently spent the night to see him wrestle on the show. Chris ran right past Hack’s parents with no pants on, cock and balls flopping in the wind. He pushed the front door open and ran out onto the sidewalk.

Chris looked around and ran up and down the block. Finally, he spotted his rental car. He looked in the car, and their Tammy was, fast asleep.

Apparently, after Raven had dumped Chris off at Hack’s place, he ended up figuring out which room they were staying in at the hotel. He opened the door, and Tammy was there, passed out from vodka. In the fucked up state Raven was in, he figured that bringing Tammy to Chris, rather than Chris to Tammy made perfect sense. So he wrapped her up in a blanket, and brought her out to her rental car via luggage cart, as well.

Chris couldn’t wake her up, so he put her on the blanket and dragged her into the house the best that he could. Once again, incidentally, he walked

right passed Hack’s parents, still with no pants on, back through the bedroom door.

SHEIK’S RETIREMENT CEREMONY IN NEW JAPAN

By the tail end of my run in ECW, my uncle was also winding down his career. Not being able to wrestle much anymore which was his life, there seemed to be less will to live. Without the wrestling, his body started to break down.

The Sheik eventually had a nice retirement ceremony in Japan, in conjunction with an FMW tour of Japan and my (gulp) wedding to a woman I met out there in 1998. His retirement ceremony was a super nice gesture on FMW’s behalf, but my marriage portion was a bit of a mistake. I digress… A very detail-oriented fan named Masanori Horie from Tokyo provided some great journaling of this tour that I have reviewed to retell the story with you here. It is a great example of how busy the ECW wrestlers could be, trying to squeeze a bunch of stuff into a very short time.

Paul E. Dangerously and ECW (Extreme Championship Wrestling) sent eight wrestlers and managers to the FMW shows taking place on 12/11 to 12/13. So on December 10, 1998, a Thursday, Shane Douglas, Tommy Dreamer, The Dudleys, Fonzie, and Francine arrived in Ikebukuro, one of the three biggest districts in Tokyo by the FMW's motor coach. (It took about an hour to travel from Narita Airport to Tokyo.)

Now, I had already arrived in Osaka from Detroit two days before for a show and beat Hido at Osaka Prefectural Sports Center in Takaishi the next night. After spending the day getting things straight, I went to meet the ECW crew. We jumped on the Yamanote Line, a famous railway circle in uptown Tokyo, to Meguro Station, then took cabs to Ribera Steakhouse. There, we ate these massive one-pound steaks that couldn’t be beat. Masa’s journal reads, “Paul E. Dangerously was too busy to come to Japan at this time.” I suppose that if he had, you can bet that his steak might have been two pounds.

The next night, on December 11, 1998, everyone turned out for Atsushi Onita's “USO” show at Korakuen Hall, including RVD arriving from a later flight. At 7:00 p.m. sharp, they put on a class act for Sheik's retirement ceremony. The Sheik was introduced to a standing ovation and raised his sword. He escorted me out carrying a steel chair in case anyone were to get

out of line. When he finally made it to ringside, he threw two of his trademark fireballs.

We circled around the ring and then ran after fans. Sheik was screaming “Allah!” and raising hell. After the grand entrance, a number of reporters from magazines and newspapers presented memorial gifts to Sheik, who kept threatening to kill them with his sword — but taking the offerings nonetheless.





RVD, Sabu, & Bill Alfonso before wedding in Tokyo (ABOVE).

Tommy Dreamer, RVD, Bill Alfonso, Bubba Dudley, Shane Douglas, Devon Dudley, The Sheik, & Francine (MIDDLE).



Rob shopping for a lovely Kimono (BELOW).

In the end, Onita presented Sheik with a special custom-made championship belt, almost like a lifetime achievement award. They hugged each other. Then, they did a ten-count gong. Sheik and I ran after some fans again and then The Sheik walked back down the aisle for the last time to the dressing room before the wrestling portion of the show began.

To the diehard wrestling fans, The Sheik will be always The Sheik, and he'll never be forgotten.

From Masa's diary, I see that it continued to be a busy week, I'll tell you. Before the 6:30 p.m. show at Korakuen Hall the next night, my ex-wife and I had our Japanese-style wedding ceremony at Asakusa Senso-ji, a real famous temple in Tokyo, at noon. We did it for her family, relatives, and friends in Japan because we had already got married in Michigan earlier. The Sheik and my aunt, Mrs. Joyce, attended the ceremony. It was very impressive, even though I have nothing impressive to say about my ex-now. Let's just leave it at that.

Before the big show, Rob and Fonzie went shopping in the popular Asakusa markets. Rob bought a pretty sweet kimono. Then, they took a cab to Korakuen Hall for a show that drew an announced crowd of 2,150. For those of you keeping track, and because I conveniently have the win/loss information in front of me thanks to Masanori Horie: RVD & myself beat Hayabusa & Tommy Dreamer… Shane Douglas retained his ECW World title against Gedo… and The Dudleys beat Tetsuhiro Kuroda & Gosaku.

After the show, we all went out to my favorite Korean barbecue joint in Ikebukuro. After another dinner that couldn't be beat, Tommy Dreamer wandered over to a Japanese collectible store to see how much they charged for ECW t-shirts. It turned out that the shirts were 3,000 yen, which was a very reasonable price for Japanese fans.

The next day was Sunday. Fonzie and I left the hotel at 9:30 a.m. to go to Korakuen Hall. The show was set for noon bell time, where they had a crowd of 2,150 fans. On this show which was also an ECW TV taping, Fonzie made a special challenge to The Dudley Boys. "If my team of Sabu & RVD can't defeat the Dudleys tonight for the ECW World Tag Team Titles in Japan," he said. "I promise that I will split the team up!" After Bubba attacked me with a piece of broken table, Rob hit a Van-Daminator on him. Then, we both pinned Bubba for the three count. Results show that

we went on to fulfill Fonzie’s promise and beat The Dudleys in seventeen minutes. It is also worth noting that for the ECW World Heavyweight Title match, Shane Douglas beat Tommy Dreamer to retain the title.

After the show, about 200 fans waited for the wrestlers in front of three elevators on the first floor. It took some time for our guys to make it down, as Korakuen Hall is on the fifth floor of the building. The group of fans grew larger and larger because there would be a K-1 kickboxing event at the Tokyo Dome at 5:00 p.m. and LLPW women’s wrestling at Korakuen Hall at 6:30 p.m. Masanori said that he was impressed that all of the ECW wrestlers took pictures and signed autographs for everybody.

After signing for the fans, we all went straight to the after-party place in Hitotsubashi which was about five minutes by cab from Korakuen. They were very warm-hearted there. Rob Van Dam toasted his friend Sabu, “*Kampai!*” - which translates in English to “Cheers!” The Sheik and Mrs. Joyce, ECW (Rob, Fonzie, Shane, Tommy, Bubba, D-Von, and Francine), and FMW (Masato Tanaka, Hayabusa, Mr. Gannosuke, Yukihiro Kanemura, Koji Nakagawa, and Kaori Nakayama) celebrated. Nakayama hankered to wrestle in ECW.

After that, Rob and Fonzie went to the wrestling store near Korakuen Hall for an appearance. They brought four championship belts for the fans to see; The ECW World Tag Team Titles, ECW TV Title, and The Sheik's belt. The ECW crew enjoyed the final night at the Hard Rock Cafe in Roppongi, Tokyo.

We left Ikebukuro in FMW's motor coach at 8:00 am for Narita Airport for 20-hour flights. We were all booked for ECW shows on Thursday - Saturday back in the States.

It was cool to revisit a tour like this by looking at a fan’s journal and I hope you enjoyed it, too. This is why your mom always said to write everything down. (However, if I took that advice back then, I would have incriminated myself for sure by now and would probably be in jail.)

HEAT WAVE ’98 & THE MOBILE HOME CAMPER

A big event called *Heat Wave ’98* was the fifth *Heat Wave* produced ECW, but the first one to actually air as a PPV. The event took place on August 2, 1998, from the Hara Arena in Dayton, Ohio. The event also

featured talent from Frontier Martial-Arts Wrestling due to a partnership between ECW and FMW that I was helping set up.

Now, a few years before this I bought this big Winnebago mobile home camper that Bill Alfonso will talk about in an upcoming guest passage. The thing was great because if you got tired, you could just pull over and sleep in an actual bed; you didn't have to find a hotel.

Anyhow, for the PPV, I drove out to the airport in my Winnebago to pick up Hayabusa, Masato Tanaka, and Hakushi (aka Jinsei Shinzaki,) who flew over here from Japan. Before heading out to the PPV which was being held in conjunction with the Dayton Fair, we stopped back at my place and had some sandwiches. After we ate, we jumped in the camper again. With me, I had one of my students; a German kid named Michael Kovack, who was a real good catch-as-catch-can wrestler, like a Steven Regal type.

When I pulled out of my driveway, I cranked up the tunes and I took off. I was driving the motorhome with the pedal to the metal, speeding up and down the street for two reasons. One reason I was testing the mobile home was because I just got it repaired. The other need for the speed was because the Japanese guys had never really seen a camper like this before and couldn't believe how it operated.

Now, when you drive a big mobile home, especially on a thin backwoods road with a divider, you really can't see behind you all that well. So, anyhow, while I was having some fun showing off a little for the boys and listening to the music, I didn't hear the cops behind me.

Hakushi was leading a chorus with the Japanese boys, trying to sing along to American radio when he looked out the back and saw the lights from the sirens.

"Por-leeece!" he said, meaning police.

"Shit."

I pulled over slowly at the first place I could find space. When I did so, I realized that it was not just one "Po-rleese" car, it was five of them.

When the vehicle came to a stop, they surrounded our mobile home with guns and dogs. Then, they pulled each guy out and threw us face down in the grass. They thought I was actually running from them in a 35-foot mobile home, with something obviously to hide.

They brought us down to the station. The Japanese guys had heard about getting pulled over in Mexico before, and new that was bad news. Because

of this, they clammed up and wouldn't speak to anyone. After being detained for almost an hour, they had surmised that I had kidnapped the Japanese guys, for only God knows what reason.

Kidnapping? What in the actual fuck?

They didn't buy my "off to a wrestling show" story, because they felt I was running from the police when I actually had no clue that they were behind me. I don't know why they thought I somehow had kidnapped three big wrestlers because I was the smallest guy there. It seriously would have been impossible. Eventually, I convinced the police to go back to my place and get my wife, who spoke Japanese. Eventually, they did. She helped translate for the boys and vouched for me. I finally got out of there with just a speeding ticket.

SANDMAN'S LITTLE CANE

There are a lot of stories surrounding incidents in ECW that have been exaggerated to a point that they have since taken on a new life. However, one thing that many people talk about is the night that Sandman decided to get real naked in the ring, and then get into a real fight with Jack Victory.

Florida was becoming one of ECW's better markets, so they were looking for more places to run. For this particular event on June 3, 2000, in Pensacola, Jack Victory was running the promotion side of things because he was local. He was hoping this gig would do well enough to secure the venue as a regular part of a big Florida loop. This, of course, would both help the promotion and help make him more money down the road.

While Jack was taking things very seriously about this show, Sandman was quite the opposite. Before the show even started, Sandman was already tanked. He was three sheets to the wind even before he walked into the place, and when he did — pulling a cooler behind him to stay hydrated.

Before the event, Paul Heyman got the group together so he could thank Jack for setting everything up. Paul gave his typical pep talk to the locker room, telling them to "go all out." Sandman heard "go all out" and through his beer goggles, he translated that differently. A few minutes later, he "took everything out" …*of his pants, that is.*

Sandman began walking around fully buck-ass naked backstage, even in areas that were not designated as dressing rooms. Then, to be extra gross, he

started dicking around with people's stuff. You know, he tea-bagged some of the guy's luggage, and he tried to stir people's drinks with his penis.

"Can I borrow this?" he asked as he took Dawn Marie's hairbrush and combed his gross pubic hair with it.

The more time passed, the more blitzed he became. It was, even more, an unfortunate thing that Sandman was booked in the main event for this evening because that just let time go on so he could drink even more and get worse and worse.

By the last match of the night, Sandman had fortunately found his clothing. The main event was Sandman, Dreamer, Raven, & Tajiri versus Jack Victory, Scotty Anton, Steve Corino, & Rhino.

Sandman's entrance to the ring was last, probably because they couldn't find him in time to go any earlier. When he finally stepped out passed the curtain, he almost took a nosedive. Thank God for the guard rails. Sandman pulled his way up to his feet and pulled his weight down to the ring like a drunken sailor.

Before getting into the ring, he went over to the timekeeper and annoyingly hit the ring bell several times. As all the guys in the ring waited for him to make his grand entrance, Sandman just lingered outside, stumbling around in his own drunken world. He wouldn't get in to start.

Trying to kill time and make the excessive drunkenness seem like it was part of the show, Tommy Dreamer grabbed the microphone. "After we get done beating up all these guys, tonight, we are going to go out to a bar and watch Sandman get naked!"

Tommy was just doing what wrestlers do. He was trying to pop the boys in the back, but he had no idea of what the Sandman was going to do next.

Sandman, of course, figured there was no time better than the present to get naked, so he immediately began to take off his pants at ringside.

Tommy Dreamer jumped out of the ring. Being an agent for the promotion, he knew public nudity was about the worst thing that one of their guys could do, especially when trying to secure a venue for regular shows and knew he had act quick. So he stuck out his arms and quickly tried to cover the cock and balls. Then, Sandman pushed his package hard at Tommy's hands and brushed it over once with his man-meat. Grossed out, Tommy got cock-shy and withdrew.

Sandman continued on, strutting his stuff like a proud peacock. He waltzed around the outside of his ring, showing off his shit.

Scotty Anton looked and about lost it. “Sandman’s dick is filthy!” He said, covering his face and burying it in the turnbuckle, trying not to laugh.

As soon as Sandman figured out how to stumble up into the ring, he did. Then before anyone was ready, he started nailing everyone in sight with ridiculous cane shots, as hard as whatever it was he had been drinking.

Not even a minute in and everyone knew that Sandman was in no shape to perform. Despite the roar of ECW fans laughing their asses off, everyone in the ring was lost as to what should happen next. Guys like Dreamer and Raven who were company loyalists knew it wasn’t going to end well, but had no clue what to do.

The Sandman was standing in the middle of the ring wearing nothing but a t-shirt with his chicken-skin balls hanging out. He was raising his arm so you could get an even better look at his well-leathered nutsack. The shitfaced Sandman did not give one shit. He laughed, grabbed the mic from the ring announcer, and decided to give Pensacola a lesson in physiology.

“You see, this is my big cane,” he said, holding up his kendo stick. “And this is my little cane.” After that, he exposed even more of his penis for all the crowd to see. Raven hid his face. “Come on, Raven,” Sandman said. “You are just miserable because you’ve been sober for thirty-four days straight.”

Sandman stayed on the mic saying he was about to do what he did backstage, walking around naked messing with people’s stuff. So he jumped back out of the ring again and tried wiping his ass with people’s signs, and whatever he could do to get a cheap pop.

The crowd started chanting. “Holy shit! Holy Shit!”

Sandman jumped back in the ring. At this point, he was acting like he was trying to pull up his underwear, but couldn’t because he was too drunk. So then he started jumping up in the air, hoping that his pants would follow gravity’s course and just go up on their own.

At this point, Dreamer and Raven just gave up. They knew that Sandman had already “killed the town” and that ECW would likely not be returning. Tommy decided to play along with the spot to try to end it, maybe, by following Sandman around. He was acting like he was trying to help him get his pants up, but never actually catching up with him to do so.

Once Dreamer convinced Sandman to stop jumping, Sandman bent over to pull up his pants. Then Dreamer stuck out his foot and pushed Sandman over to the mat, face first. After that, Tajiri jumped in and tried to help pull Sandman's pants up and almost got a greasy dick in the eye for his trouble. Then, Tommy Dreamer rushed over again and actually helped Sandman finally pull up his underwear.

After Sandman had his pants back on, Raven tried to cover that last train wreck of a spot with more comedy. He looked under the ring for anything he could find to improvise off of and returned with a bull rope. Then, he gave the other end to Dreamer and spun it like a jump rope. Sandman took the lead and jumped in between them.

Steve Corino shook his head and grabbed the mic.

"Look, Dreamer. You need to get a handle on the poster boy for AA," he said. "Even though there is no reason this match should even go on since Sandman is literally about ready to pass out, we should either wrestle a traditional match, or just let Rhino go finish the job on Sandman's wife."

Sandman, at a loss for words, dropped his pants again and mooned Rhino.

Jack Victory by this point was fucked. After this, it became a total shit show. While the rest of the wrestlers went on to try to have the match as planned, Sandman kept throwing tables in the ring. He simulated fellatio on his cane, then wandered to the back. Finally the match got underway. However, it wasn't long before Sandman just returned to ringside with a 12 pack of Budweiser.

After refueling, Sandman came in and caned all the heels again even harder than before, and then everyone bailed to the outside. Sandman jumped out too, then threw two more tables into the empty ring. He was highly intoxicated and not looking out for the well-being of anyone, including himself.

At the very end, Sandman somehow managed to climb to the top rope and put Rhino through a table with a Swanton Bomb. Then, Sandman caned Rhino over and over again until Dreamer came in the ring to DDT Rhino for the pin and finally put that shit-show to an end.

Backstage, people were pissed! Dreamer was furious at Sandman's dangerous actions, and even traded shots with Sandman before it was quickly broken up.

“What the fuck were you even thinking?” Heyman screamed.

Sandman didn’t reply.

“Fonzie, go get a car right now and have Sandman removed from the building,” Paul said.

Sandman stormed out of the room.

After that, the heels in the tag match grabbed Paul to further complain about the brutal cane shots. Paul nodded. Then, Jack Victory complained even more, highlighting the nudity and drunken behavior that would likely “cost them return business in the town.” Paul agreed.

Paul Heyman went and found Sandman in an extremely small restroom which was described as being as narrow as an airplane shitter. Jack Victory was not too far behind him, and visibly hot because he promoted the show and Sandman destroyed his hard work. While Paul was scolding Sandman, Victory reached over him and nailed Sandman with a forearm.

Heyman stood between the two men for a moment, trying to keep the peace the best he could. Because of the small space in the bathroom, Heyman was shoved into the stall and forced to stand on the toilet seat so they could get at each other.

It was on.

Sandman retaliated with a finger gouge, scratching at Jack Victory’s eyes. Victory grabbed Sandman by the ears, bashed his head into the wall and then hit him with a series of four quick headbutts.

During all the commotion, Sal Graziano, a 400-plus pound giant of a man, ran into the tiny room. He wriggled his large body into the scuffle and somehow squeezed right between them.

“The fight’s over!” Graziano shouted, pushing Jack Victory out of the bathroom.

Everyone calmed down.

The two walked back to their dressing rooms in silence. Victory’s eye was puffy from the gouge, and Sandman was actually bleeding from the headbutts that he took, but both were said to be all right. Within minutes after the fight in typical ECW family fashion, sources say that Sandman and Victory were already over it. There was no heat and they were already joking together about the fight.

Sandman was apologetic and willing to accept any disciplinary action or punishment that Paul deemed necessary. Paul ended up suspending

Sandman for two weeks along with some kind of fine.

In the end, the money that Sandman would have been paid for the missed shows was re-invested in advertising for the next PPV. Paul figured that way, the entire company benefited, thus turning a negative into a positive.

As far as “return business” was concerned on Jack Victory’s part, in hindsight, it really didn’t matter. ECW would eventually “run out of business” about eight months later anyhow.

WHAT’S BAD FOR BUSINESS

I don’t know if it was because of financial issues or what, but Paul’s word just wasn’t any good anymore. At around this time, I had helped Paul bring in guys from FMW into ECW for television. The wrestlers would come over, but they would never come back. Why? Because Heyman never followed through on his promises and the guys did not get paid what he said he was going to give them, and sometimes they didn’t get paid at all. Stiffing a guy who came on an international flight was a pretty shitty thing to do.

At this point too, everyone in wrestling was trying to outdo themselves, not just Paul, but he certainly fell into this trend. The problem was promoters tried to book every event like it was “the end of world” for every single show.

FMW was guilty of this. When they first started having barbed wire matches, they had one big one a year. Then, they bumped it up to one every tour. This grew to four barbed wire matches a tour. After a while, I worked sixteen matches on an FMW tour and only one of them was a regular match! The problem was, the constant booking of barbed wire matches didn’t equate to the same pop from the fans as the first one, what it did was lessen their enthusiasm and burn out the fans, overall. Nothing was special anymore. I guess you could look at this from the terms of an addict. You want to get that first real high again, but you can’t. You have to keep adding more and more to the amount you take, but it never works because a tolerance for it has been built up. That’s why people die, and that’s why crowds die.

I remember how we had an absolute cluster fuck of a six-man tag at *November to Remember* 1998. I mean it was horrible. There were all kinds of different agendas and bullshit coming into play that it ended up being one

of the worst matches I have ever been in. It became such a bad match that, when we made it back to the locker room, everybody knew there would be a fallout. Paul Heyman and Taz had some heated words — then more and more. They both started shouting and it seriously almost came to blows. As much as I would have liked to see them both go at it, I actually had to pull Taz away so he didn't kill him.

Towards the end, ECW had lost a number of guys and new people were taking their spots. The locker room kept changing which was bad for continuity. At one point a new guy, Steve Corino came up to me and said, "I know you don't like me, but I'm hoping to change that."

"Wait. Who the fuck even are you?" I replied.

The turnover was so bad that I seriously didn't even know he was wrestling for us. Because of all the new faces in and out, I guess I slighted him thinking he was security.

END OF ECW APPROACHING

With the end of my ECW career approaching, I look back at it now and see that it was probably a good thing that things started to slow down for me at that time.

I had compiled a list of injuries during my ECW tenure that rivaled Evel Knievel. The list included many broken ribs, a broken jaw twice, and breaking my neck twice; once from Chris Benoit at the 1994 *November to Remember* and the other from a Taz-plex through a table in December 1998.

So when Paul Heyman stopped paying me for about three months straight and also owed me seven years of royalties, I was already thinking about calling it quits and taking some time off to heal. As the debts started to rack up, I started looking for a way out. The royalty thing was huge because Paul promised I would collect seven percent of the total of everybody else's royalties because of my contribution to ECW with the table spot gimmick and everything else.

With all of the international offers, I wanted to go on tour to make more, but I could see that just wasn't happening under the ECW contract. One night, I just had enough.

We were in the locker room. All the boys were having a good old time as they usually did before a show, smoking and drinking a little to get the edge off. I was sitting with Fonzie when Heyman came over to my circle.

“Tonight, I need you to do the favors for Super Crazy,” he said.

“Super Crazy?”

Now, I had no problem putting someone over, but at this point I was almost looking for any reason to leave.

“Super Crazy,” he repeated. “In a three-way with CW Anderson.” Then, he handed me some kind of script.

“Paul, what is this?” I asked sarcastically. “You know I can’t read.”

The boys around me laughed.

“I am sorry, Mister Sabu. Let me try to accommodate you then,” Paul said.

Turning my joke around on me, Paul Heyman read the script out loud with the whole locker room around him, almost like I really couldn’t read. The tone he took was somewhat insulting and it made me feel like an idiot. Knowing I had been really cool with Paul to allow him to delay paying me for so long, I was pissed.

After that, Heyman threw down the paper. When he was finally finished babbling, he stuck out his hand.

“Do we have a deal?”

I didn’t speak. I just shook his hand, picked up my bags, and left the arena.

It did not matter who I was going to put over that night. If I was not being paid and expected to do all these favors, I knew it was time to go before it got even worse.



MIKEY WHIPWRECK on OZZY

On January 30, 1996, I was ready to rock. I was not wrestling on some show, or anything. I was off to Hershey, PA to see one of the greatest rock legends of all time. Seeing this guy perform live on stage was a dream come true, but that wasn't the only thing I was excited about.

A cool DJ I knew who was also a big wrestling fan got me some VIP backstage passes to the show. That meant that, if I played my cards right, there was a pretty good chance that I, Mikey Whipwreck, aka the King of the Underdogs, was going to meet one of the biggest names in music, the Prince of Darkness, Ozzy Osbourne.

So, just as my DJ friend had suggested as a tip to maybe actually talk to him, I went early — way early.

The show wasn't set to start for another three hours, and there I was, showing up like a rabid groupie. Much like wrestling, apparently, the rock guys don't really want to hang out after a show, either. They are on the road so much that there just isn't any appeal in lengthening their "workday." If you just performed you are likely sweaty, tired, hungry, or a combination of all three. Therefore, hanging out when you don't really have to is usually not a practice that any busy entertainer really wants to do.

I was playing it cool. After checking in with some guy holding a clipboard, I started wandering around the inner chocolatey bowels of the Hershey Park Arena. The problem was, I actually had too much access. I could go wherever I wanted for the most part and didn't really know where to even look. So for the first half hour or so, nothing. I guessed I was just too early.

When I headed over to the other side of the arena, that's was when I began to see some signs of life. I started poking my head in rooms, when all of a sudden, I saw a familiar face holding a guitar.

"Hey," I said to the famous ax-man. "You are Zakk Wylde."

"That's right," he said trying to be polite while he was clearly also trying to run through some pre-show ritual. "That I am."

I told him I was a big fan, but I think he already knew. I shot the shit with him for a minute or so telling him about ECW. He listened, but I knew he was kind of busy. Before I could duck out of the conversation and let him get back to work, I think that the grizzled veteran Zack fell back on an

escape plan that he had probably fallen back on many times before. The perfect way for Zack to get rid of someone in the nicest way possible was to give them exactly what they really wanted. That is when the legendary guitarist led me right to Ozzy's private dressing room.

"Hey Oz," Zack said. "Somebody here would like to meet you."

Ozzy laughed, "Hello?"

"Hey Ozzy. It's a real privilege," I said, shaking his hand, and shaking in my boots at the same time.

"Hello," Ozzy said. "So, what you do for a living?"

"I'm a pro wrestler. We work with the radio station," I said, trying to offer an excuse for why a pro wrestler would be allowed to walk around backstage at a rock concert.

"Oh?" he said. "I love me some pro wrestling from time to time."

"Really?"

He laughed. "Yes, yes. I was just watching some crazy wrestling last night at the hotel. Fuckin' crazy, man."

"Crazy?" I knew what he was talking about had to be ECW. It would have been a Tuesday night and that meant he wasn't watching WWE at the time. "What did you see?"

"One fucking crazy guy," he laughed really hard, sipping his beer and held it up. "Cheers to you guys! Unreal!"

It was instantly killing me. Wondering who he was referring to, I had to investigate a little so I could bring the unfolding Ozzy story back to the locker room for the boys with more detail.

"Who did you see?" I asked. "Maybe I work with them. Do you remember their name, maybe?"

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "Sorry."

"Hmm. What did he look like?"

Ozzy paused for a long time in traditional Ozzy-fashion and finally said in a moment of clarity, "Baggy pants?"

"Oh, no shit? Drinking maybe? Was it the blond guy with a cigarette?" thinking he meant The Sandman.

"No, no, no," he said. "This bloke was flying around, doing backflips all over the place. Then, he flipped himself over the ropes and landed on another guy who was passed out on a table. He fucking broke the table right in half, and the other guy on it, too!"

“Sabu?!”

“Sabu, yes!” he laughed holding his drink up again. “An Indian fellow, I think! That’s it!”

“What did you think about Sabu?” I laughed.

“Well,” Ozzy paused again a beat before answering. “He’s a sick fuck! Fucking sick, right?”

“That’s saying something coming from you,” I joked.

“Fuckin’ right!” Ozzy said.

- MIKEY WHIPWRECK




WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT WRESTLING CHAMPION
WWF

CHAPTER 12 – XPW, WWA, & 3PW

Tired of getting bounced checks and hearing lies from Paul Heyman, I'd had enough and pretty much left ECW. Unfortunately, the promotion as a whole was a sinking ship.

In August 1999, ECW went national on The National Network (TNN) for what I thought was supposed to be a three-year contract. Despite having virtually no real advertising and producing shows with a very low budget by television standards, ECW became TNN's highest rated show. However, that didn't matter. ECW on TNN was canceled about a year later in October 2000.

Now, I don't know why this was possible, but something happened where *WWF's Monday Night Raw* randomly left its home on the USA Network to move over and bump us on our network. Coincidence? My guess is no.

Without a home, anyhow, Paul Heyman started looking for a new TV network. Without being able to land another national television deal, ECW started to die.

ECW was still a "mom-and-pop" company. ECW was, in fact, a major influence on professional wrestling happening everywhere. It had become the third largest company in the States, just under WWF and WCW. Sure, it was on national TV, but we didn't have the proper foundation to compete in the big leagues. ECW didn't have financial backers, and they didn't have advertisers with a steady revenue stream to pull from. Without the financial backing to get what we needed to compete on the same level as the WWF, ECW couldn't really grow.

If ECW had the money to invest in promoting live events, it could have moved out of bingo halls and into bigger arenas. If ECW had enough money to sign their own wrestlers to competitive contracts, they wouldn't have invested valuable TV time building up their characters to only have them leave us to go to WCW and WWF. If ECW had that capital, maybe they could have brought in one of the stars of the "big two."

ECW was a company living week to week. Paul would bring money in, and sign big checks sending it right back out. For the most part, nothing extra was being saved that could be invested back into the company itself. ECW was an operation that was still being run right out of the wrestlers' apartments.

After the cancellation of the television program, ECW struggled. Financial decisions had been based on money that Paul thought was going to come from TV before the rug got pulled out under them. When that dried up, it threw his whole formula off.

Trying to secure a last-minute TV deal to save the company was impossible. That type of thing takes months. Now, all of this would have been totally understandable by the boys if only we had known, but the thing we didn't like was the fact that Heyman had never told us any of it. To keep things going afloat, Paul told everyone in the company that everything was just fine. He created a false sense of security when he should have told us the truth — *that ECW was on its last legs.*

What he did was pretty filthy, if you ask me. Here and there, he borrowed money from the wrestlers. He kept guys working and offered twice the amount he owed people if they accepted IOUs as payment. He assured them that cash flow would soon be restored, and that everything would be "fine" soon, and that he would only be unable to pay them for a short while.

Eventually, he couldn't do it any longer. No deal came through and the bills were outweighing the income so much that there was just no saving it.

When Paul finally filed for bankruptcy, he said that the company had assets that totaled around $1,385,500. His paperwork claimed that the asset total included all kinds of debts owed that he still hadn't received. The balance of uncollected assets included $860,000 from Acclaim (for video game royalties), from Original San Francisco Toy Company (for action figure royalties), and from the In Demand Network (for PPV royalties). The actual physical assets mostly included ECW's videotape library ($500,000), a 1998 Ford Truck ($19,500), the ring ($1,000), and whatever was left from their inventory of merchandise.

Now, the money that ECW owed was close to $9 million dollars. Wrestlers and talent were owed the most on that list. If you look at some of the figures that Paul reported to the court, you may find them interesting:

Rob Van Dam ($150,000)
Shane Douglas ($145,000)
Tommy Dreamer ($100,000)
Joey Styles ($50,480)
Rhyno ($50,000)

Francine Fournier ($47,275)
Sabu ($2)

Fucking $2 owed to Sabu — *that's it?* Was that calculation a rib by Paul Heyman that I would not see until finally doing research for this book? I don't know, but I do know that's bullshit for sure. "Hey Sabu, I owe you lunch." That amount would only indicate, like, a Big Mac.

Wow, Paul. What a cunt you were! A rib in the paperwork? I guess it was a way to get my goat then, but we are both older and it's all good now. I don't care anymore.

Anyhow, once the writing was on the wall, ECW ran a little longer, but we were no dummies. A bunch of us who were getting smart to the situation abandoned ship. Some guys who didn't have a whole lot of real options stayed, listening to Paul's lies. Newer guys without contracts, like HC Loc, a referee-turned-wrestler, really got screwed. They weren't making much to begin with and were actually dipping into their savings to show up to events.

Tony Mamaluke, a smaller cruiserweight with a Mafia gimmick, had jumped to ECW after a quick appearance with WCW to join Little Guido in the FBI. He had saved about $50,000 before that, he said, but working for Paul for about six months on IOUs ended up wiping him out. Between believing his lies and working for promises, the travel and expenses he incurred working for ECW ate his whole account and there was nothing left.

I didn't fall into that category of suckers. I just said "fuck it" and sat home when an ECW show was far away and required a plane ticket. I knew better than to spend any of my own money out of pocket.

At this point, most of the guys started looking for appearances with other promotions to pay the bills.

XPW

Big Dick Dudley came to a few of us and told us that he was getting a pretty good payday for doing similar ECW type stuff at a promotion on the

West Coast called Xtreme Pro Wrestling.

“The promotion sucks, but at least I got paid,” he said.

XPW started sometime in the summer of 1999 out of Los Angeles, California. Stealing a page out of ECW’s hardcore wrestling style book, it only made sense for some of the ECW boys to pop up in that promotion.

Little did we know at the time, however, was that XPW would soon be considered by many (like the Bleacher Report) to be one of the absolute worst wrestling promotions ever.

This one guy, Rob Zicari, was the promotion’s owner. He also appeared on the shows as being the on-camera owner, working under the name Rob Black. The promotion focused on hardcore wrestling and had connections to the Los Angeles porn industry because the owner was married to a porn star.

Rob Black had made a fortune producing what could often be referred to as being “gross-out “adult entertainment.” It wasn’t just traditional pornography. It was people humping while smearing shit on each other’s faces, or people banging and cutting themselves to rub blood all over their bodies. Most of these films with Rob often starred his then-wife, porn star actress, Lizzy Borden. With that money, Black was able to buy a ring and run his dream side-business, an independent wrestling promotion that featured adult “entertainers” as valets.

In addition to the promotion’s filthy background, XPW pushed these weird soap opera-like storylines into its wrestling to try to produce character development. The plots often involved porn star cameos, questionable alternative lifestyles, and then topped everything off with dark, sadistic violence. This shit was weird, and that coming from me, who up until this point thought I had seen everything wrestling had to offer, that really says a lot.

Before ECW had totally closed shop, my new “boss,” Robert Black, came into the locker room all excited before one of the shows. He had recently made me their heavyweight champion, and at least he knew I had been around the block some, and respected what I thought.

“Look at this,” he said opening up an envelope.

I was taping up one of my ankles that was bothering me and getting ready for my match. He stood there until I looked up to see what he was holding, so I played along.

“What’s that?” I reluctantly asked.

“Well, you know how some of the best storylines involve realism?”

“Okay.”

“I bought six front row tickets for *ECW's Heat Wave* 2000 when they are coming over here for their PPV.”

“For what?” I asked. “You going to mark out for Dreamer or something?”

He laughed. “No, I want you and some of our guys to go to their show and make it clear that ECW is on enemy turf.”

“Not happening.”

“I’ll pay you, of course.”

“Still not happening,” I said. “This is a bad move. Don’t do it.”

“Wait, why?” he asked. “It will cause some friction and be great. You know, like an invasion kind of thing. Even if they don’t mention us, the sheets will pick it up and get our name out there.”

“Invasion stuff is planned. If you just try to do a real one, it is not going to come off like a TV angle,” I said. “Security will just kick you out.”

“No, we will time it so the wrestlers have to take notice.”

“That’s fucking stupid,” I said. “I’m warning you, they will just like kick your ass.”

“I think it would be great if you join us,” he said. “Keep your name hot and all.”

“No thanks. I’d rather stay cold.”

So I refused. I warned them and did everything short of begging them not to go and be stupid, but they didn’t listen.

At the start of the *Heat Wave* main event, the XPW pulled their shit. The members of the group were Messiah, Kid Kaos, Supreme, Kristi Myst, Homeless Jimmy, and Kris Kloss. They stood up and pulled off their shirts, revealing XPW logos underneath, thinking they were the now or some shit. It was all pretty embarrassing.

Once Tommy Dreamer saw the logos of the home company, he just called over security who ejected the XPW group from the building.

Although a few fans did show some support for the outlaws by gesturing with the signature XPW arm signs, just as I had said, nothing made it to the screen. XPW was never officially acknowledged on the telecast.

“Apparently, The Sandman must have shared a few too many beers with some of the fans at ringside" Joey Styles, ECW's color commentator said

after seeing what was happening. Being the professional that he is, he dropped in a little blurb to cover the scene in the event that maybe a camera angle picked up a glimpse of what was going on.

The ECW locker room heard a murmur of what was going on, but it was a game of telephone. Someone surmised that Francine, who was still out at ringside, maybe got slapped on the ass. That maybe turned to fact, and everyone got pissed quickly. The ECW locker room was a family. They took that slap on the ass as a slap in the face, and they were not having it.

"One of the guys grabbed her ass at ringside?!"

The locker room funneled out into the lot looking for the XPW wrestlers and found the ring crew, who were waiting in a getaway-car-like situation to drive the group away in case things went sour.

Then, just as I had suspected, a brawl in the parking lot broke out between the XPW ring crew and the ECW locker room, with the XPW wrestlers not involved.

Picture New Jack's music hitting, full blast. Then, right there by the road in a street fight match-like fashion, the ECW wrestlers ran out like they were entering a gauntlet match. They looked for any trace of the invaders that they could find, and ended up beating the living shit out of the XPW ring crew who were wearing their colors. They brutalized the hell out of those guys until the ring crew left "crying for their mommies," bloodied with missing teeth.

The next time I saw Rob Black backstage, he was talking to his battered and bandaged up minions. I laughed, and he didn't even look at me. I did all I could to not say, "I told you so." Then, I think I said it anyhow.

Hot off of their shoot-ECW invasion, XPW planned a big show for July 22, 2000, called *Go Funk Yourself.* The main event had me defending the XPW World Heavyweight Champion at the Los Angeles Sports Arena against my arch nemesis, Terry Funk. This "one year in business" milestone event was considered the highest point for XPW. After that, everything started to fizzle. They just weren't smart. It was like four more months until the next XPW show and they lost all their heat in the meantime with no follow up.

They promoted and then failed to bring in Onita for a Japanese death match that never happened. And then I was supposed to run a big feud with

Messiah and drop the belt to him, but then that fell through too, as well. You see, Messiah got fired before our match for fucking the boss' wife.

Clearly, Black had to change his plans after that. He was not going to put the guy his wife cheated with on top. After all, he had already been on top of his wife and that was bad enough. So, Black had to “make other plans.” He apparently also made even more plans than just having me drop the belt to him and his manager in a handicap match.

After Lizzy Borden ended up getting a little too close to Messiah and let her into more than just her heart, some say Black decided to take things into his own hands. One night after a show, two guys were paid to visit the Messiah’s apartment and they were not looking to get saved, either.

As the story goes, the former XPW champion, William Welch, aka Messiah, had just been fired from the promotion when news broke of his affair with Lizzy, Rob Black's girlfriend. On Thursday, August 1st, 2002, reports said Messiah was in his apartment in Canyon County playing a video game while his roommate stepped outside to walk the dog.

Messiah said in police reports that two African-Americans, both in their mid-20s, around 6’0 and weighing 230 to 250 pounds, came to his door. Messiah was told that they were friends of his roommate. So he greeted them and showed them into the apartment to wait for his roommate. Then, he went back into his bedroom to play video games.

The two men put on masks then rushed Messiah from behind. They pulled him out of his small bedroom to beat the dogshit out of the alleged cheater. Legend has it that the Messiah never saw it coming. He was blindsided. The assailants dragged him into the living room, then said how they were going to make Messiah “pay the ultimate sacrifice for his sins.” Before he knew what was even happening, they cut off his thumb with garden shears to leave him with a permanent memory of “what he had done.”

A quivering severed finger on the carpet was not enough. Fighting back the best he could and shifting into self-defense mode, Messiah made a fist. This fist, however, was not made to punch someone. As they tried to duct-taped his wrists together to get at the other hand, he clenched it tightly so they couldn’t take their Brutus Beefcake clippers and chop off his other thumb.

The frustrated attackers gave up and hit Messiah over the head with a big-ass fish tank. Next, the muggers tried to pull Messiah's pants down so they could cut off his holy penis. Dizzy but not out, he crossed his legs as hard as he could, and they ended up just stabbing him in the groin area with the garden shears. One puncture wound was very deep and he was bleeding like crazy from his leg.

Messiah was a professional wrestler, so he was no pushover. He was fighting back way more than the attackers had imagined he would. They continued to nail him with everything that was not nailed down in the apartment. Beating him with the furniture, they were hoping to knock him out for a better chance at more dismembering. Somehow, Messiah came through and broke one of the attacker's arms in the process.

Unsuccessful in cutting anything else off, the attackers decided to cut their losses and leave. They didn’t want to be considered rude however and leave the place a total mess, so they also decided to pick up Messiah’s dismembered thumb and take it with them on the way out.

Fucking disgusting!

When the police finally arrived, they couldn't believe their eyes. It looked like a demon had been set loose from Hell to get the Messiah. His place was in shambles. He was covered in blood and there were stripes of dark blood all over the white walls and floor. Using a hand with a missing finger, he was frantically trying to pick up the flopping fish from his broken aquarium and get them to his sink to safety.

“Something was fishy,” pardon the pun. The police saw that the assailants didn’t steal anything and figured that there had to be some kind of ulterior motive. Because of the timing of the whole thing, many people figured that the attackers weren’t thieves, they were rather hired thugs for revenge. They were “brought in as bounty hunters by Rob Black” as his muscle to pay back the wrestler for banging his girl. The police were never able to prove this, however.

Messiah said he knew exactly who was behind the attack, but he never saw justice for what had happened to him. However, Rob Black was featured and fingered as a suspect on an episode of *America's Most Wanted* regarding the attack. XPW and its promoter were the major focal points of the show that night. Their reporters even showed up to the XPW office, but they refused to answer their door.

I think it is important to also note, however, that Rob Black has never been questioned or officially named as a suspect in the case. I would have loved to have continued to work for him, but a red flag was thrown right and I stayed away after that. I would have liked to have said, “Rob, you can’t get mad when you marry a porn star and then she goes and bones other people,” but I didn’t. (I liked my thumbs.)

Apparently, the porn culture was always pretty prevalent in the XPW locker room. This one guy, Donovan Morgan, almost walked in on a shoot one day. He tells a story now of how he left his first promotion, APW to become the head trainer at XPW. On his first day on the job, Donovan went to lunch. When he came back to the office, some of Rob’s boys were there and they wouldn't let him. Curious, he went around the back and peeked in a window. There he saw a “nice girl” sitting at Rob’s desk blowing about six guys at the same time, and one of them was a midget.

He quit shortly, thereafter.



NEW JACK IN XPW

Before ECW was gone, on March 12, 2000, at the *Living Dangerously* pay-per-view in Danbury, Connecticut, New Jack had a scaffold match with Vic Grimes. Now, Vic was a big bastard. He weighed something like 350 pounds. So when Vic Grimes locked up with New Jack and fell around fifteen feet off a scaffold, you knew the impact was going to be bad. To make matters worse, Vic missed the tables that were supposed to absorb the blow of their fall.

Instead, Vic Grimes landed hard on the concrete floor, but not before locating the softest thing his fat ass could find to absorb some of the impact: *New Jack's head.*

After that match and if he already wasn't fucked up enough, New Jack suffered legit brain damage. He had a number of operations and was never really the same again. He also suffered permanent blinding in his right eye.

Although it was an accident, New Jack openly vowed to get revenge in promos whenever he could. Eventually, a rematch between the two for February 23, 2002 was booked for an XPW show aptly called "Freefall" in Los Angeles.

During this bout, a scaffold once again was directly above the ring. For the finish, New Jack grabbed Grimes and threw him off the scaffold but again missing the tables. Grimes gross bulbous body plummeting around forty feet down to the ring with no tables, nor skulls to break the fall.

The stunt clearly didn't work out as planned, or at least as they had discussed backstage before the match. Grimes only slightly braised two of the twelve tables that were intended to break his fall and ended up dislocating his ankle when it smacked down hard on the ring rope.

It was later revealed that maybe things did turn out at least how New Jack had planned, on his own. In the 2005 documentary *Forever Hardcore*, New Jack said that he intentionally threw Grimes too hard passed the tables because he wanted his body to hit the ring post on the way down. New Jack said that he wanted Grimes severely injured or better yet, killed for what happened to him before. However, others say that under closer evaluation of that spot, a trained professional can see that Grimes noticeably pushed off the scaffold with his foot himself, sending his pig-like body out further than he should have. Many think he subsequently overshot the tables due to his own actions.

New Jack being the old school carney that he is possibly just took credit for the spot so he would look even more hardcore and then maybe get even more bookings.

Also from in that same interview, New Jack admitted that the first accident in that first *ECW: Living Dangerously* scaffold match was actually his own fault. He said that he pulled Grimes down from the scaffold too early. He wasn't really pissed at Grimes about the accident. What he really didn't like was how Grimes tried to make himself look good in the locker room shit-talking at New Jack's expense.

"He went around so much bragging to the boys that he hurt me that I had to find opportunities to correct him and tell everybody, no, (it was my own fault) I hurt myself."

This maybe explains why New Jack claims he intentionally shoved Grimes towards the outside of the ring that second time around. The boast is probably less the fact that he wanted Grimes hurt as revenge for blinding his eye than it was to one-up Grimes with his own shit-talking in the locker room to the boys. I'm not defending New Jack, I just think he was trying to take credit for the second accident, the same way that Grimes did the first time around.

Anyhow, just like I tell people today, New Jack also says that working for Rob Black was a fucking crazy.

New Jack told me once that after working an XPW match, Rob Black explained that he didn't have all of his money with him. After the show, he asked Jack to meet up with him at a warehouse for payment. New Jack was tough and didn't expect any Messiah-like foul play, so he obliged.

When he got there, Rob let him into his warehouse. He was hoping that New Jack would go through all kinds of boxes, like a kid in a candy store, and pick out some of his merchandise instead of taking cash.

Yes, Rob Black was actually attempting to pay Jack with whatever sweet porno DVDs he wanted.

100 PERCENT J.R.

Remember how I mentioned that I think Jim Ross is a cocksucker?

Back around this time in 2001 or so, I kept getting calls from Paul Heyman. He had successfully made the jump over to the dark side, and he needed to make himself stand out in WWE as a big shark instead of one of the little fishes. Therefore, knowing that I had been a good meal ticket for him in ECW, he had hoped that maybe I could come in and do the same for him in New York.

Like other ECW guys, I still had heat with Paul over money and promises that he never made good with. But as any wrestler will tell you, "a payday is a payday," so I didn't mind listening to the devil when there wasn't food on my table, and I was hungry.

Paul kept calling me with all these tidbits of info. He kept giving me contact numbers and leads to a possible job. After every call, he would always suggest I suck it up and throw my name in the hat. I don't know how many times he pushed me to swallow my pride and call Jim Ross, the Head of Talent Relations in WWE from 2001-2002, but it was a lot. However, no matter how many times Paul told Jim I would be calling him, it seemed like my messages were either not getting to him – or, of course, just being ignored.

Finally, I think Jim had had enough of my voicemails, and he finally called me back.

"So, Terry. I got your messages, and I'm sorry I haven't gotten back to you sooner. I've just been really busy," he said.

"That's okay," I said, even though I wanted to say something else like, "That is probably because you are a fat lazy piece of shit."

"So, Terry. One reason I didn't get right back to you was I had heard that your health wasn't up to par," he said. "What is your condition? Are you 100 percent?"

"Just about," I said. "My arm is a little messed up, but it's almost better."

"Well, the problem is," JR said, "I honestly don't think you will ever be able to work 100 percent here at WWE." Using "100 percent" in this context meant I would never come in and work a full-time spot on the roster under his watch.

Very Funny.

"Okay. Well, fuck you then," I said and hung up.

Regarding that call today, I would like to once again say, “Fuck you, Jim.” Not only was that ugly comment not funny, but you are an ugly fat son-of-a-bitch yourself, and that’s something you can never fix.

Many years after that call in 2001 (and after my whole run in WWE that Jim Ross had nothing to do with,) I was invited to a WWE Hall of Fame. I was excited to see many of the boys, again after so many years, but knew there was one downside to attending. The only person I wasn’t thrilled about coming across was, well, guess who? Good Ole JR.

Now, Melissa, my girl, is much nicer than I ever will be. When we showed up to the induction and started greeting everyone, she saw Jim Ross over in a corner and figured it would be a good gesture to have me squash the heat between us.

“Go over and bury the hatchet,” she said.

“In his back you mean?”

“No! Go shake his hand.”

Well, eventually I did because Melissa asked, but I fucking hated it.

I’m sorry his wife died, but he’s still an asshole.

JUGGALO CHAMPIONSHIT WRESTLING

For those of you who are not familiar with them, the Insane Clown Posse (ICP) is a hardcore underground hip hop duo from Detroit. The group is composed of Joseph Bruce and Joseph Utsler, who have these evil clown personas and use the names “Violent J” and “Shaggy 2 Dope.” ICP has a very gimmicky style, and this makes sense because they are huge wrestling fans themselves — so much so that they created their own wrestling promotion to run shows during their weekend get-togethers.

Their *Juggalo Championshit Wrestling* is by far the oddest promotions I have ever worked for. For those of you unlucky enough to not know what a Juggalo is, allow me to enlighten you. Insane Clown Posse fans are called “Juggalos." Juggalos, I guess, come from all walks of life, but there has recently been a push by the government to consider them a gang. However

you look at them, they are all sort of goth-rap, tattooed, body-modified misfits, who often paint their faces in their own rule-breaking clown persona.

By definition, I guess Shaggy 2 Dope says that just about anyone can be a Juggalo. “It doesn't matter if you're born with a silver spoon in your mouth or a crack rock in your mouth.” At the first one of their *Gathering of the Juggalos*, I saw this first hand.

So in the early 2000s, ICP first decided to promote their own festival with everything that they liked, to celebrate with their fans. These shows were loaded with crazy music, hardcore wrestling and all kinds of nasty acts of debauchery. They planned it out to be like an evil rap-based Woodstock, with bizarre sideshows and weird spring break-like activities. Some sideshows include comedy acts (like “JJ” Jimmy Walker), Human Cannonball, wet t-shirt contests, the Life-Threatening Bonfire, the Violent Inflatable Games (where you fight other Juggalos with blow-up boxing gloves on a waterslide). JCW is their wrestling promotion and it is one of the biggest sideshows at the Gatherings.

Because of loyal die-hard fan support from all of their Juggalos and Juggalettes, The Gathering of The Juggalos has since become an annual week-long getaway where they take over an entire campground or park and put up a few stages for huge musical acts other than ICP to perform.

My first a short stint with Juggalo Championshit Wrestling was on July 14, 2001, in Toledo, Ohio. The Clowns started with me winning a battle royal to determine the new JCW Heavyweight Champion after the title had been vacated earlier. I’d held it for maybe one or two days, when the former champion, Vampiro, won the championship back.

As I recall, I felt like ICP were being real marks backstage and actually kind of rude at the time. I remember the first time, Joe booked me at something like $10,000 to work for them for their big week-long event. However, when I first met Violent J, I didn’t even know who he was. He was acting like a big mark and said that he was The Sheik’s long lost son.

I kicked him right out of his own dressing room.

I’m not the only one who thought they were disrespectful for not really being in the business. Abdullah the Butcher was there too, and they were yelling “Hey, Larry,” backstage like he was one of the Three Stooges, and

then continuing the gag in public making him out to be Curly in the commentating.

When I wrestled for my first JCW event, the people blew my mind. The crowd was hot, but they were more insane than the Clown Posse was itself.

There was open pot-smoking, which I didn't mind. There was lots of nudity with strangely-pierced lady parts. I believe, at one point, I saw a fat pregnant Juggalette flash, squeeze her juicy tit, and spray down the row in front of her with milk. It really was all kinds of nonsense like that. It was the most distracting crowd I had ever encountered.

I remember another time they booked me on a JCW tour. One night, they didn't even have me wrestle a match. They just wanted me to go "Faygo crowd surfing." (Faygo, by the way, is a super caloric, high sugar, highly-caffeinated beverage that all the Juggalos love.) Since crowd-surfing was an easy payday, I agreed to just do a run-in during one of ICP's live performances.

Before I surfed the crowd, backstage hands kept tossing me bottles of Faygo, almost like I was Steve Austin. The first handful, I opened up and drank like the Texas Rattlesnake, himself, spilling half of the sugary shit all over me. After I was covered, I then took my spike and sprayed the audience with the Faygo. The audience loved it. The last one I stabbed, however, was just about as crazy as the rest of them. Because it had been shaken up a little, when I stabbed one of the bottles, it took off like a rocket and crashed, exploding on the back row. Nobody gave a shit and it got a huge pop, so I made even more of them fly like rockets.

As the ICP did more and more shows, they got it. They treated the wrestlers how they were supposed to be treated and the whole Gathering thing got bigger and bigger. Come 2007, I worked for them practically every year at their event. In my initial return to JCW in 2007, I teamed with the Insane Clown Posse themselves to defeat Trent Acid and the Young Altar Boys at Juggalo Championshit Wrestling's *Bloodymania*.

One of the interesting things is in both of our times in ECW, Raven and I never really got to wrestle each other except for the angle that didn't finish in TNA, so the clowns decided that we should do so for their promotion. So, in 2008 for the second season of JCW's internet wrestling show called *SlamTV!* I was booked to work with Raven. For the lead-in to me working with Raven, the champion, Corporal Robinson, put his JCW Heavyweight

Championshit on the line against a guy named “Sexy” Slim Goody. When Robinson went for his finishing move, the lights shut off. When they turned back on, Raven was in the ring and hit Robinson with his DDT. In the third episode, Raven and Sexy Slim Goody knocked Corporal Robinson out with a steel chair. Raven then began to shave Robinson's afro off with electric clippers. I came out of the crowd and scared Raven off, leaving Robinson with a half-shaved afro. This led to a tag team of Raven and “Sexy” Slim Goody against Corporal Robinson and me in the following episode.

Now, if you are fortunate enough to be able to get a copy of this excellent piece of wrestling history, you will notice that I am not wrestling in the traditional style that most people know me for. The reason for this was because I had fractured my hip just before the show. Because of this, I had to wrestle very old-school. Just the basics. I mean, normally, I don’t want to even accept a booking if I can’t do the moonsaults and all the hardcore things that I am known for. However, with so little notice, I was basically reduced to stomping, punching, kicking and hitting guys with chair shots, but not taking many. This led up to my first one-on-one headline with Raven.

By the time that *Bloodymania 3* event rolled around in 2009, The Gathering of The Juggalos had become a big-time event. People flew in from all around the world to take part in it. While the openers are spinoffs or acts actually produced by ICP, they now could afford to bring in real headliners. Guest acts included artists Busta Rhymes, Mystikal, Coolio, Juvenile, Lil’ Jon, George Clinton & Parliament Funkadelic, Saliva, and Ice Cube. They also brought in a guest celebrity host for each night's main stage including people like Dustin Diamond, Charlie Sheen, and Flavor Flav. They promote nostalgic retro names like The Fat Boys, Biz Markie, and MC Hammer almost as it is a big joke. It’s kind of like the celebrities are saying, “We really need the money.” From what I understand, Vanilla Ice has performed at almost every gathering.

At *Bloodymania 3*, finally, I would take on Raven for the first time in a “Raven's Rules” match. For this one, Raven was managed by "Wildfire" Tommy Rich. At one point in the match, I locked Raven into the Camel Clutch, and Tommy Rich ran into the ring. Acting as if he was going to attack me, he turned on Raven. I went for the finish. I set Raven on top of a

table, climbed to the top rope, and performed a leg drop, just as planned. However, we didn't plan a botch.

"Fuck!"

The table did not break. I leaned over to ask Raven what we should do, and Raven laughed. He was fucked up, and I was too. Now, normally you wouldn't party before a match. The only guy who really did that from the ECW crew was Sandman, but Scotty and I never did. We considered ourselves too professional to do so. However, this was the Juggalo promotion and getting fucked up was pretty much encouraged 24/7, so I laid there for a second and laughed, too, but tried to hide it the best I could under my hair. After Raven recovered, he put me up on the table and climbed to the top rope this time. Raven jumped down at me with his elbow out, but I moved out of the way. The finish was saved and I pinned Raven for the win.

The next year at the Gathering, a reality show star named Tila Tequila had the honors of being booked as a celebrity guest host at Cave-In-Rock, Illinois. She also had the honors of getting her little ass beat by Juggalos who didn't like her attitude. She was scheduled to do a six-song set. However, only days before, she made fun of the very Juggalos online that she would be performing in front of. The fans weren't stupid. They took note of her "fakeness" and were waiting for her. Before Tia even came on to perform, mobs of Juggalos were collecting in the crowd. It was evident that her appearance wasn't a draw in a good way. Word got out quickly that a poser was there collecting a payday. Chants and signs were made calling her everything you could think of — but none of it good. They were booing her and chanting obscenities at her before she even started. This was heat, but *bad heat*.

Tequila was the heel. To the Juggalos, a group of misfits in the Land of Misfit Toys, Tequila represented a lot of things, all of them negative. She was every girl they ever masturbated to in high school but could never find the courage to ask out. She was every hot girl at the bar who they bought drinks for, but instead, went home with a preppy asshole in a Tap-Out shirt.

In the "Seminar Tent" Violent J and Shaggy 2 Dope held a State of the Juggalo address explaining some of the acts the fans could expect to see. There, they predicted how their insane fans might act toward "the popular girl" but tried to squash it.

Violent J said, “It is funny as shit to watch some dude get hit with a dead fish or pelted with piss, and that Juggalos should feel free to behave however they see fit. At the same time, however, every performer at the Gathering was a guest of the Psychopathic Family and should enjoy the same privileges.”

“I’m tryna fuck that bitch so don’t be fucking it up for me,” Shaggy said.

Later that night, Tequila finally walked out onto stage super late surrounded by security. Wearing nothing but a tiny pair of Daisy Dukes that showed her whole ass and an even smaller bikini top, her looks didn’t matter. The hotter she was, the more they hated her. Tequila started her act complete with bad “white girl” dance moves, and the lamest lyrics possible about sleeping with DJs and kicking peoples’ asses. She came off fake, and the sharks smelled blood.

Tequila hid behind her security guards as the audience angrily began to launch shit at her from every direction. In wrestling, this kind of heat can be good, but this wasn’t a wrestling event and it went too far. The fans looked like a rabid wrestling audience in Puerto Rico. Her singing wasn't getting over with them, no matter how hard she tried. The young, mostly male crowd started in with the worst chant you can think at a woman, “Show your tits! Show your tits!”

Trying to win them over, she actually whipped her puppies out in desperation. Even though her tits were nice, it didn’t work. The chant immediately turned into, “We hate your tits! We hate your tits!”

Juggalos went on pelting her with shit. That’s right —*literally shit*. One guy in the back said they even threw a half-watermelon shell full of urine and feces at her face. With what looked like peanut butter sundae syrup all over her, the guards finally ushered her offstage.

After that, everything went downhill fast. Tila in her own words to reporters said, “Dudes were throwing huge stone rocks in my face, beer bottles that slit my eye open, almost burnt my hair on fire. They threw fire-crackers on stage and they even took the shit out of the port-o-potty and threw shit and piss at me when I was onstage.” Tequila said that after the audience stormed the stage, her bodyguard and other security personnel grabbed her and ran to a nearby trailer for shelter, but that didn't stop the Juggalos. "Since their security sucked, two thousand people were still running after us, trying to kill me," Tequila told TMZ. *"It was scary as*

hell!" The rabid crowd broke the windows and tried to get her. Three guards inside the trailer had to hold tables over the broken windows to prevent the people from storming the inside of the vehicle.

Throwing stuff was not a barred hold by the ICP fans, by any means. Two years after this on August 10, 2012, Ric Flair was booked for the week-long gathering to be their celebrity MC. He reluctantly accepted the booking, after hearing from the boys how rowdy the fans get. While Flair was performing his hosting duties he began getting pelted with bottles from the crowd. “I didn’t sign on for this,” he said. He immediately left. ICP understood, and Flair was paid in full.

Now, I’m mentioning the story above because whenever I’m there, the Juggalos make me feel like I am one of them. If I were to walk down to the “Drug Bridge,” an infamous spot in the campgrounds where everyone parties, I wouldn’t have to pay for anything and would be treated like a king. In my Gathering experiences, the Juggalos never threw stuff my way that I didn’t want thrown at me. I got free food, free drugs, free whatever I wanted.

By my February of 2011 booking with JCW, they did something they called *Flashlight Hysteria*. This event was at The Modern Exchange in Southgate, Michigan. What they decided to do was something short of innovative, but also asinine at the same time. Now, the guy I worked with was Bull Pain. Bull started off as a generic enhancement talent under the name of Rick Gantner in both the WWF and AWA. He knew the basics. In USWA and GWF, however, Pain took on a gimmick of a roughneck wrestler but still didn’t find much exposure until a run with Big Japan that boosted his career. After his Japan stint, Bull Pain brought the Japanese deathmatch style back to the States, establishing himself as a top wrestler for IWA-Mid South, and then he ultimately became an occasional main eventer for JCW. Bull Pain was not the fucked up thing about our match at all, though. He was the sanest thing about it.

First off, the first 2011 show started at 4:00 a.m. which was un-fucking-heard of for a wrestling show, but that wasn’t the weirdest thing about it. The most bizarre thing was what they were calling “Flashlight Wrestling.” This was a gimmick match that ICP came up with where they shut off all the lights on the ring and let the fans control the lighting at their will. The only light source was their bullshit flashlights pointed at the ring.

Talk about bullshit.

Now, stop for a second and think about how important light is at a crucial moment in the match. Picture you are outside the ring and an opponent is about to jump down on you. In this type of spot, you have to catch the other wrestler so he doesn't kill himself — you have to break his fall. Now, leave the lighting to a Juggalo's asshole discretion.

As your opponent jumps, all those dickheads shut off their flashlights! Guys were getting kicked in the face and landing on the floor. It was funny, but it was ridiculous. Bull and I did the best we could, but the match was mostly in the dark and mostly the shits because most of the fans controlling the light were high as hell.

The bigger payday thing wore off pretty quickly. The last tour I worked for them was for something around $200 a show. They wanted the "homie" price.

FMW DEATH

Back in early 2002, FMW (where I got my first real big break) was falling apart. I was still working there, and would until the very end, where things would also end for the promoter in one of the most fucked up ways possible.

During most of my time there, the guy running the show was Shoichi Arai. He was the promoter who ran Frontier Martial-Arts Wrestling from 1995 until its demise in 2002.

Arai knew FMW in and out. He started as a gopher, like an assistant, bringing guys to airports and getting food - you know, stuff like that. Arai eventually became the ring announcer. If you watch some of the death matches, you can hear his high-pitched voice during the countdowns. Eventually, he worked hard and moved his way to the top of FMW, the Chief Executive Officer.

Soon after I started with ECW, Atsushi Onita retired from FMW. As the new CEO, Arai came in and changed the tone some in hopes to bring in more money for the promotion. He cut down on a lot of the crazy trademark

death matches that they were known for and moved Hayabusa into the spotlight as the face of the company.

In 1996, Onita got the itch again to wrestle and returned home. However, in his absence, a lot of things had changed. Because of this, he caused a lot of friction backstage wanting to take back the helm. Due to Onita's new ego and the attitude he had towards the younger stars, Arai began to force him out of FMW by the way they structured everything.

FMW's new direction was completely different. FMW started to look more like WWE, transforming its hardcore style to an even more marketable entertainment-like show - especially after FMW signed a TV and pay-per-views deal with DirecTV. Fans didn't take to the massive changes. Instead of bringing in mainstream money, many of their followers abandoned them, and FMW lost a shitload of cash. Even though the Yakuza had an influence on FMW before this, Arai had to hit them up for big money to keep things a float.

In October 2001, while attempting an Asai Moonsault in a match against Mammoth Sasaki, Hayabusa slipped off the ropes and landed right on his head. He was instantly paralyzed and the match was career-ending.



Here I am wrestling as “Sabusa” at a tribute for Hayabusa after his injury

Without their main star, the houses went way down and FMW had to declare bankruptcy early in 2002. FMW was already three million dollars in debt, and on top of that, Arai now owed the Yakuza another million. He was fucked.

Arai had to go into hiding. He was getting death threats from the Yakuza, who did not recognize the restructuring settlement from the courts. Arai wore disguises in public and became paranoid. He was careful everywhere he went and many believed he was losing his mind.

Finally, a desperate Arai went to the press, blaming FMW's problems on Onita, and exposing him for his horrible ego and excessive womanizing. He then announced a tell-all book in hopes to make enough money to pay back the debt owed to the Yakuza. Things moved too slowly and Arai started coming up with crazy ideas on how to pay the Yakuza to finally get them off of his family's back.

FMW was running on its last legs. The last show was announced for February 4, 2002, at the Tokyo Korakuen Hall. I was booked on it tagging with Tetsuhiro Kuroda versus Kodo Fuyuki & The fucking Sandman for the FMW/WEW Tag straps. We lost, but even worse, we didn't get paid as planned, despite the fact that the show sold out.

Arai sent us home without getting our pay and said he would send us the money. When we called later looking to get paid, they said nobody could find Arai and suspected that he killed himself. Hayabusa said that Arai talked about suicide as his last option so that his life insurance would pay off the Yakuza and thought that was the case. But maybe that didn't happen... just yet.

A few months later, come May 16, 2002, Japanese newspaper headlines said Arai must have finally gone through with his plan. Apparently, a jogger found him hanging by his necktie from a tree that morning in Tokyo's Mizumoto Park.

Shoichi Arai was later buried at Saitama Kawaguchi Memorial Garden, with an FMW logo on his gravestone - representing the company that he pretty much died for to keep alive.

Arai's alleged suicide did result in a life insurance payment to his ex-wife and child. However, the payoff did not cover all of Yakauza's debt. Arai's family continued to pay the Yakuza for years.

WWA & MORE INDIES

After that first ICP show in 2001, I continued to take bookings everywhere. One of the more noticed bookings I took was when I went to work for World Wrestling All-Stars.

Late in 2001 and into 2002, I was working a lot of shows for this promotion and others with Fonzie as my manager. This practice almost became the norm and promoters knew it was pretty much the deal. Fonzie followed me as my manager to many independent shows. For WWA, it is also worth mentioning that my appearances with Fonzie also included PPVs, which was something relatively unheard of for an independent promotion.

World Wrestling All-Stars was a promotion run by an Australian concert promoter named Andrew McManus. The promotion started out a year before I showed up or so in 2001. It was one of several promotions with big

money behind them coming into existence after both ECW and WCW trying to pick up the slack. They were considered a successor to WCW and ECW due to using most of their former talent and a precursor to TNA: Total Nonstop Action Wrestling.

Vince Russo was supposed to be one of the head writers but had some kind of conflict at the time of the promotion's start, so he was more like a consultant. He recommended former WCW ring announcer Jeremy Borash to be the booker in his absence and pretty much run the talent for its shows. Borash focused on signing wrestlers who didn't go to the WWF after they bought out WCW. They hoped to provide an alternative to WWF, but really only lasted from 2001-2003.

Some famous WWF and WCW wrestlers that worked for these guys included Sting, Bret Hart, Sid Vicious, Buff Bagwell, Lex Luger, Jeff Jarrett, Road Dogg, Rick & Scott Steiner, Psicosis, Devon Storm, Juventud Guerrera, Jerry Lynn, Shane Douglas, Stevie Ray, Mike Sanders, and Disco Inferno. Borash was smart and also booked a number of good new talent to be the backbone of the company. These names included AJ Styles, Chris Daniels, Frankie Kazarian, and Shark Boy. (This basis would obviously soon become the same core at TNA after WWA fell apart.)

The first big show I worked for them was in February 2002 at their *Revolution* PPV. Taking place in Las Vegas in my spot was against Devon Storm in a hardcore match. Our feud continued at "Eruption in Australia" in April, where Storm and I were pitted in a steel cage match. It ended in me coming off the top of the cage onto Storm, who was unconscious on top of two tables stacked on top of each other.

After that, they continued to pump money into what they had hoped would be the "next big thing" as far as wrestling promotions were concerned. WWA's European tour went from November to December in 2002 where they shot a big budget PPV in Glasgow called *Retribution* which aired two months later in February 2003. On this tour, I worked a lot with Perry Saturn and Simon Diamond.

Eventually, they learned the hard way that wrestling fans at this time wanted live PPVs and that flying big name wrestlers all around the world was expensive. When the money started to run out, WWA threw what would be their last PPV, "The Reckoning" in New Zealand. During this tour, I worked with Shane Douglas leading up to the big PPV payoff, but

Shane got hurt. So what they did was have Douglas at ringside when I wrestled against Joe E Legend instead. That was about it for those guys.

I remember shortly after things fell apart, I got a call to work for Eddie & Tom Farhat, that's right — my cousins — the sons of The Sheik. All World Wrestling League began in April 2003 and was a legitimate spin-off of Big Time Wrestling, the same promotion made famous by their father. They didn't have the financial backing of WWA, but they also didn't try to conquer the world.

Around this same time, I went to work for a promotion called MECW out of Indiana, which was beyond welfare. I did a few shows for them, and let me tell you, after making big money and being flown all over the world and then working for them, I felt like the drizzling shits. This was probably the lowest point of my career.

The "promoter" (and I use this term loosely) I think just booked wrestlers so he could hang out with them. One night, my music hit and I walked out to wrestle in front of 15 fans. It wasn't just me; his locker room included Curt Hennig, Barry Windham, and also Public Enemy. The thing that made this even worse is that after freebies, only four of them had and the rest of them in attendance were the wrestlers' wives!

As you would expect, the guy who ran this bullshit welfare cheese promotion had no money at the end of the night when it came time to pay us. Before I went back to the hotel, he handed me what I figured was a rubber check, one that would bounce. The next morning, I drove over the bank it was supposedly drawn off of, and to my surprise, I learned it wasn't a rubber check at all.

When I went in to cash it at the bank, they first delayed me for some time. I waited around and they had me sit in the manager's office saying that there was a problem with the computer and that they couldn't access the funds.

That's probably because there are no funds in that mark's bank account to start with.

I waited it out, hoping to get my money. All of a sudden, the police showed up and joined me in the office. They almost arrested me on the spot.

It wasn't a rubber check at all — *it was a counterfeit check!*

The manager of the bank said it was the worst counterfeit check he had ever seen and had accused me of printing the promoter's check on a

computer!

3PW

Also overlapping this whole timeframe in 2002, ECW fans will probably remember that I worked for another hardcore promotion called *Pro-Pain Pro Wrestling*. This company was based out of Philadelphia and even ran in the former “ECW Arena.”

With ECW leaving a void behind, The Blue Meanie decided to step up and give promoting a shot. He decided to fill the “hardcore hole” appropriately with his porn star girlfriend, Jasmin St. Claire. She was, incidentally, known to be “hardcore” herself but for a whole different reason. At the time, she was known for winning the prestigious world record of banging the most dudes at the same time on video, after surviving a 300-man, pussy-pounding, over-the-top, gang-bang battle royal.

Blue Meanie really wanting to give the ECW flavor back to the fans, so he soon enlisted the services of ECW promoter Tod Gordon. They booked former ECW names like Raven, Sandman, Bigelow, the Funker, and Al Snow. Then, returning the favor for using him on some NWA Sabu shows, Meanie brought me in when I really needed a paycheck. (He’s a good dude.)

The 3PW shows initially ran at the ECW Arena, but XPW’s Rob Black didn’t like that at all because he was running there too. XPW threw the arena some extra money to get an exclusivity arrangement with them, of course, to reserve it for himself. (Rob Black might not have liked the fact that I wasn’t working for him exclusively. However, he didn’t use me enough to warrant any kind of contract that could include exclusivity so I just worked for both companies whenever I was called.)

Meanie didn’t seem to care that badly about being ejected out of his former home base. He just moved 3PW to another place called, “The Electric Factory” for their regular shows in Philly, and they still cranked out some pretty good shows.

They had a good couple of years, but come late 2004, 3PW ran out of cash. Eventually, Tod Gordon resigned over a money dispute. When St.

Claire also stopped receiving her royalty checks, she said “fuck this” and decided to sell her share of the promotion. In a move only a porn star would consider, she put her share of 3PW up for sale in a one-day auction on Ebay.com. Nobody bid on the promotion at the hefty $180,000 starting price, but I do think she got a “Buy-It-Now” sale from a pair of her used panties.

In the end, Meanie was unable to find an investor, and the final 3PW show was June 18, 2005.



BILL ALFONSO on MANAGING SABU

In 1978, I broke in. I had worked on and off for various shows, but on this one particular show in Amarillo, TX, Dory Funk paid me, so I consider it my first professional match as a referee. Since then, I have pretty much seen it all and done it all, but that first match really was something else. It was Terry Funk versus the original Sheik. I didn't know it at the time, but this would lead me to a relationship with Sabu some twenty years later!

I remember the first real "hardcore experience" that would eventually lead me to ECW happened in Florida. One night, it was Barry Windham, Steve Kern, Mike Rotundo and myself driving through the Everglades. Cell phones were just coming out so this was a little before everyone had that, but we all had guns, snakeskin boots, and radar detectors.

We stopped the car to get out and shoot our guns at the gators.

"Hey, Fonzie," I heard Steve Kern say. "I'm going to warm up first. See that sign over there? I'm going to hit it."

Kern raised his nine millimeter and got ready to fire.

"Aw, come on, daddy," I said to the man who would ironically become the crocodile tracker "Skinner" in the WWF. "Anyone could hit that sign."

"Okay, okay," he replied. "I'll hit the pole, then."

I bowed and gestured my hand in that direction. "Okay. Let's see what you got."

Kern fired. The bullet ricocheted and hit Barry right in his leg.

Barry dropped.

We flipped out. We didn't know what to do. We went over and could see the bullet sticking out of his leg. Using a jackknife, Kern and Mike were prying the bullet out when Dusty Rhodes called Barry's mobile phone. I picked it up.

"You boys are cutting it awful close," he said. "You coming to the show or what?"

I looked over at Barry, and he nodded. "We will be there, daddy."

They got the bullet out, and it started bleeding like a son-of-a-bitch. Barry just taped it up and we were off to the show where he would go on to wrestling an hour-long Broadway with Harley Race.

Now, at the time, I thought that was hardcore as Hell — *but this all happened before I had met Sabu*.

When I got to Philly to do ECW, I had just gotten off road with Vince. Shane Douglas was impressed with my work, so he had a hand bringing me in. For those of you who don't remember, I was considered corporate, so I played off of that idea. I was doing this whole "Stop the Violence in Wrestling" angle as a rule enforcer which was the exact opposite mindset of what the ECW fans were all about. The people instantly hated me.

I was pretty much a black sheep in my first few months there in ECW. I had never really met any of those guys before so everyone was a new face in the locker room. It was only by chance that I was got to work with Sabu.

"You know what my first match was?" I asked him. "It was Sheik versus Terry."

"Whoa," Sabu said. "Tell me about it!"

"Well, I can't tell you much, but I can show you," I said. "Your uncle stabbed me with a pencil, right here."

I showed him the lead spot on my arm. Sabu laughed like never before.

We clicked.

I was eventually booked to be the mouthpiece for Taz, but honestly, I had never talked much as a referee. So when I started doing interviews despite having been in the business for fifteen years, I was still kind of green on the mic. Tommy Dreamer was cool though, producing me on promos. He explained how the fans were super smart and told me to "treat my interviews like a shoot."

That began the five-year run that got me over in the business even more than being the third man in the ring for the WWF.

Being the manager for Sabu later was a treat. Sabu is legitimately one of the toughest guys I know. Now, I don't mean "tough" as if he could beat up guys like Bam Bam or Douglas kind of "tough," but I mean the kind of "tough" in that he could take pain like nobody else I have ever met.

I once saw this crazy bastard do a moonsault onto an upside-down table — landing on the leg mouth-first. And that wasn't even the worst of it.

When people ask me today what the most hardcore moment I ever saw in ECW was, I have to answer honestly and tell it like it is, daddy. The barbed wire match with Terry was just about the craziest thing I've ever seen, not just in ECW, but all of wrestling.

There was a moment in the match when Terry shot Sabu into the corner where there wasn't a turnbuckle — just barbs. I had a closer than front row

seat and watched the wire go right into his arm and tear it open.

Now, the ECW ring crew didn't really know what to buy when they were prepping for this match. ECW was hardcore, but it wasn't FMW. They had never hosted a match like this one before in this promotion. So, before the show, they went out and bought the largest gage barbs available to "make it look cool on TV." However, the largest gage wire was also the most dangerous.

When we first got there before the show, by the time we saw the wire that would replace the ropes, it was already too late. Sabu and Terry just laughed and just, "Okay, we will have to make it work." Only a few hours later, the metal rope was ripping Sabu's skin from his armpit to elbow.

After he hit the corner, it looked like Biology class and the fucking frog all over again. His bicep was practically hanging right out of his body. Sabu went into shock for four or five seconds or so, I think. His eyes glossed over and the blood started to spill. Then, he shook it off and focused.

"Fonzie," he yelled over the bloodthirsty screaming fans. "Get me some tape!"

I was almost panicking, but I ran back to the dressing room as fast as my feet could carry me.

"I need some tape! I need some fucking tape," I said.

It is all a blur, now. A few people came running to see what my problem was, but they didn't have tape in their hands. I don't really remember, but I think maybe it was Mikey Whipwreck who finally brought it over.

I ran to the ring with a white roll of athletic tape that immediately turned red. Sabu wrapped and wrapped his arm like a fucking mummy until the blood disappeared. The match didn't skip a beat, and it was immediately back on with Sabu taking a neck breaker still wrapping his arm.

Talk about a high tolerance for pain? I was positive that Sabu would be going to go to the hospital when we got back to the dressing room. I mean, that cut was pretty fucking wide.

"I'll call an ambulance," I said, or something to that effect.

"No," Sabu said. "Fuck the hospital — we have EMTs."

No anesthesia. Nothing for the pain. Sabu had an EMT stitch him up with like 50 stitches until he couldn't take it anymore.

"Ouch, it hurts," he said. "Okay, that's good enough. Just get me some glue."

Sabu had me get some super glue out of his bad and he finished up the backstage surgery himself.

Besides being one of the toughest guys in the sport, he was also one of the most generous. Sometimes after a show when we would go out to get something to eat, Sabu would say, “Order like you are buying, and I’ll pay.” The idea was, don’t order a massive steak or everything on the menu just because you know someone else was offering to foot the bill… “Just get whatever you would normally eat, and I’ll pay for it,” he said.

One funny time I remember going out to eat with Sabu was when we were in Japan for Onita. “Come on, guys. We will take you out to a restaurant,” he said after the show. Sabu and his wife wanted to host us for a good meal and then took us out to this Japanese place that was almost like a fancy buffet.

We were having a grand old time talking, laughing and drinking. However, I did notice that Sabu and wife were eating kind of fast. After we were all done, we found out why that was; the restaurant was all-you-can-eat, pay-by-the-minute!

Even though he was watching the clock the whole time, Sabu didn’t say anything to us, however. He was happy we were all having a good time and didn’t want to ruin the fun because of money. I’m pretty sure he spent his whole payday on us that night.

Sabu is quite a character.

One time at Sumo Palace in Japan, it was me, RVD and Sabu signing autographs. Sabu kept up his no-talking gimmick for the most part, but when he had to, he would treat the long line of fans funny with a whole “get away from me” kind of attitude.

Eventually, one guy was being kind of dickish. He was pushy and trying to get everything he could out of Sabu. So after Sabu signed his shit, as the guy was walking away, Sabu kicked him right in his Japanese ass.

The rest of the people in line popped in the typical Japanese way.

“Ooohhh! Ahhh…”

Now, I don’t know if this was like an Inoki slap-thing or not, but everyone who came through the line after that bent over to get their asses kicked by Sabu. Sabu laughed and kicked probably a hundred more asses that night after that first asshole’s ass.

How can you not love Sabu?

One day back in the States, Sabu had seen a WWF tour bus somewhere on the road and got the idea into his head that he wanted a new Winnebago camper. He figured we could ride to shows in class, and if we wanted to stop and sleep, we could just do it and not have to hunt down a hotel room. He thought it would just be great to drive out of Philly in a mobile home that very night, so making that happen the next day is what he was going to do.

After a show somewhere, I took the earliest flight in to meet up with him at the dealership to help him out with the deal. By the time I got there, Sabu was already at the table with the salesman and had decided on $90,000. The guy ran his credit, which wasn't bad, but bad enough that he needed to get a bigger down payment. We rushed around to make it happen and it worked.

By the end of the transaction, the guy was showing Sabu how to run his new Winnebago. He shows him how to start the generator. He showed him how to fill the water tank. He showed him how to empty the shit and piss. It was funny to see the lesson and, all the while, I was trying to take a video of each step with a not-so-smart early form of a mobile phone. I figured that way, if we forgot how to do something with all of the information we were getting at one time, we could always look back at the clip and see what we needed to do.

So, anyhow, we barely know where to put gas in and Sabu realized what time it was and was like, "Let's go! We have to leave," ignoring the instructions.

It was awesome. Like real pros, we packed up to start the six-hour trip or so to the Elks Lodge in Queens.

It was smooth sailing with Sabu behind the wheel until we saw a pretty low bridge approaching on one of the back roads.

"Sabu, the sign says 11'8, but the Winnebago is like 11'6," I said.

"So," he replied. "Two inches. We got room."

"But what if it is a little off, daddy?" I asked, being conservative.

Sabu didn't respond. In fact, he picked up speed.

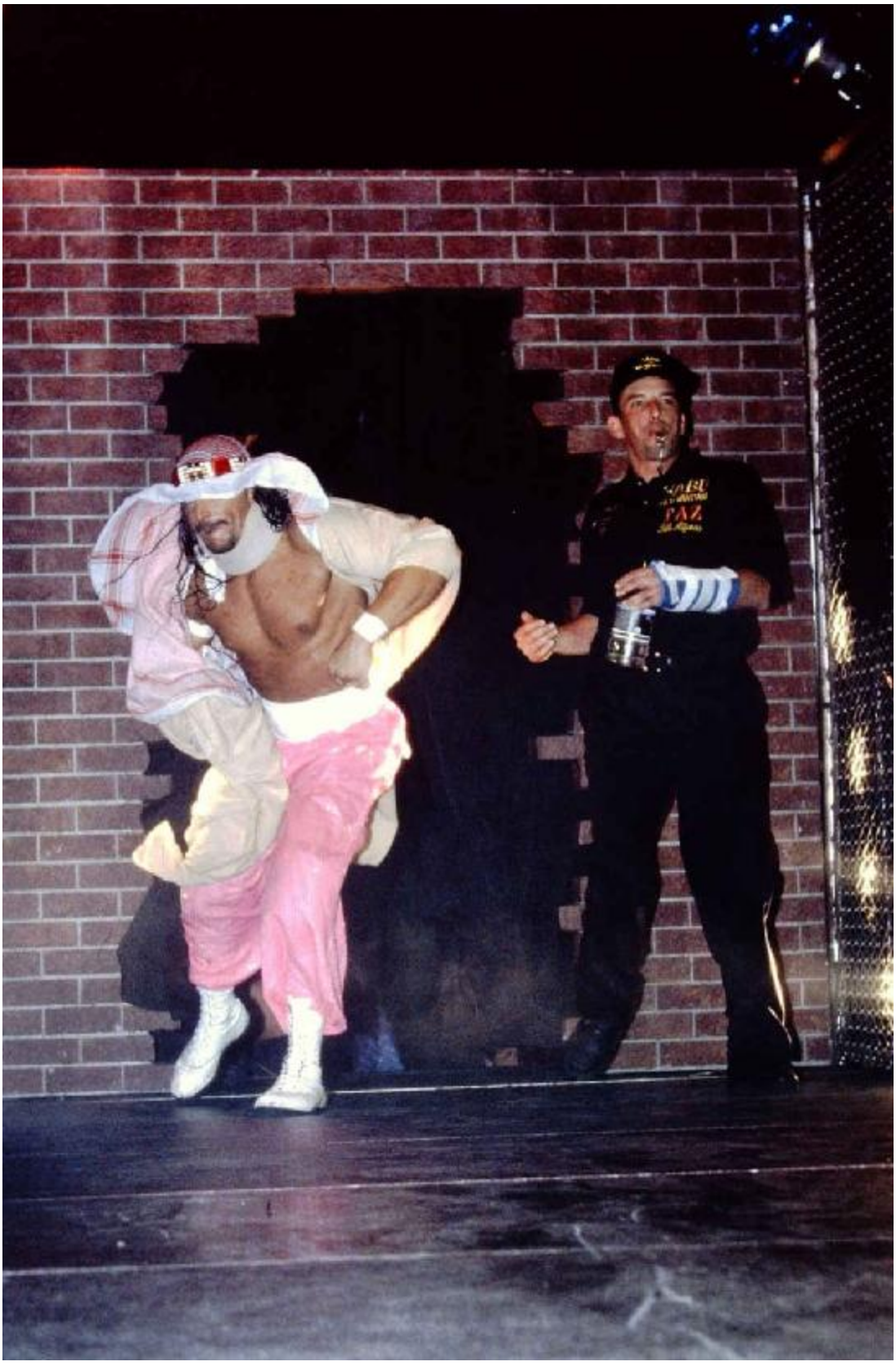
Vrrrooommm!

Now, the body of the mobile home was, in fact, 11'6, but there was other shit up there like an air conditioner and a luggage rail. The key word in that sentence is "was."

I don’t know what he hit but he definitely knocked something major off the roof, and it sounded like a hurricane coming through.

To sum it up, Sabu is by far the toughest, most hardcore, generous and funny guys I know – and I’m calling it right down the middle, daddy.

- BILL ALFONSO


FAZ

CHAPTER 13 – TYPICAL INDY

It's very common for wrestlers with TV experience to be booked on a lot of shows everywhere to help promoters draw. The sheer amount of these random promotions out there that most fans from another state perhaps have never heard of is tremendous.

When a "name wrestler" is booked, usually the whole show revolves around that one name. They are like the one big celebrity being celebrated. The posters have them on it. The main event is all about them. The entire budget is often dedicated to the star. This today means that a name wrestler who knows what they are doing can often get paid even more from doing these "spot shows" than if they were to work for a big promotion with a lot of talent on it. The one name would get the bulk of the take. Because of this idea, the range of what a name wrestler can make is crazy.

It really is a crap shoot in the wild, wild west of independent wrestling. Like Forrest Gump once said, "You never know what you are going to get." Sometimes the promoters do a really good job and draw a ton of people to a decent nice clean arena. Other times they only promote on Facebook, drawing only the friends and family of the wrestlers on that card, and the venue is a real shithole.

Ever hear of wrestling promoter Mike Sparta? He was a good example of both. Rather than to spotlight the hundreds of little promotions out there that you could end up seeing a guy like me working for on the weekend, I figured I would give you a look at one promotion that epitomizes a "typical indy."

Living in New Jersey, I was booked a lot in the Northeast area because I was considered a "drive-in." I would get to know a lot of the guys in NYC, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, and up and down the East coast because I was a "name," I was good in the ring, and they had easy access to me. This meant a promoter didn't have to pay for a flight for me. They would maybe just throw me a little extra on top of whatever they were going to pay me for "trans," and save hundreds of what it would cost to fly a name in. This was and still is common practice.

It's not uncommon for a wrestler to drive six, maybe eight hours, or sometimes more to the next gig. We know we are not getting paid for the 20

minutes we are in the ring, but rather the number of hours it takes to get there and back.

The World Wrestling Alliance (WWA) was a New England-based wrestling promotion that was much like many others I worked for, and continue to do so. It was located in Massachusetts and started in 1996. Like many promotions, it was first founded by a semi-lesser-known name from the business. In this case, the promoter was a former WWF referee named Fred Sparta, who also enlisted help from his brother Mike. They ran some really great shows, and they also others that were the absolute shits.

For those of you who are not familiar with the vast Northeast independent scene around Boston and other cities in Massachusetts come the late ‘90s, there were three big promotions in general; the WWA, Sheldon Goldberg’s NECW, and a promotion in northern MA & NH called *Chaotic Wrestling*. I worked for all of them, and a number of fly-by-night bullshit promotions that would run one show, lose their shirts, and never be heard from again. This occurrence also still is the norm.

In April of 1998, WWF officials came to the WWA looking for a place where their next generation of WWF stars could compete and get polished, and thusly, the WWA began serving as WWF's official developmental “farm” territory in the northeast for a time. This relationship was not as well-known as some others, so I thought it would be interesting to mention this promotion here.

After Fred retired from WWA in the year 2000, Mike pretty much inherited the company. I worked for him on a number of occasions, as did other ECW originals including Chris Candido, Tommy Dreamer, Sandman, and The Dudley Brothers.

Promoters are often characters themselves, and this case was no different. Mike Sparta looked a little bit like a cross between Austin Powers and *Eastbound & Down*’s Kenny Powers. He was slightly insane. He used foul language all the time and had a thick Boston accent. He would often refer to a guy on the card as being a “fuckin’ fuck” almost like that terminology was accepted everywhere. Because of his whiney voice and odd choice of wording, everyone and anyone who worked for him always developed an over-the-top ridiculous impersonation of him.

“Hey Annnnthony,” you would often hear ring crew mocking him before a show. “Go ovah there, open tha cah door, and get me my grindah, you

fuckin' fuck." (A "grinder" by the way is Bostonese for a submarine sandwich or hoagie.)

On September 13, 2003, Fonzie and I were booked to work a show at the Arlington Memorial High School in Vermont. I remember being told by Sparta that the school was having a fundraiser for their athletic department. In typical indy wrestling fashion, however, I heard the show ended up costing them more money than it had made. One of the reasons for this was because they had a brand new gym floor re-done and painted, and the ring crew scratched the hell out of it. (Those fuckin' fucks!)

WWA always had some decent talent on it. It had some veteran guys like Tom Brandi and Tom Pritchard booking the shows with newer talent like Luke Harper and Damien Sandow, years before they signed with the WWE. The first few years, Mike Sparta used Tom Brandi as a booker which he would continue to do off and on throughout the promotion's history. Some will remember him from his short-lived stint as Sal Sincere in the WWF, and maybe others as Johnny Gunn in WCW.

The main event of the evening was myself reunited with Bill Alfonso as my manager again, against a decent guy named Don Vega with his manager Kenny Casanova (the guy who incidentally helped me with writing this book.)

Before the show, you could hear that the crowd was already hot. The promoter got together with the boys in the locker room beforehand to give us some obligatory instructions.

"Now, listen here you fuckin' fucks," Mike Sparta said in his trademark gross Boston accent. "NO FUCKIN' SWEARING, okay? There are lots of kids out there, tonight. So keep it clean. No swearing, no Stone Cold middle fingers, none of that fuckin' shit, okay?"

Mike Sparta was one of those guys who would always try to pay his undercard wrestlers off with a hotdog and a handshake, so nobody often took him all that seriously. (This is why it was always important to have a good booker there running the locker room, someone the boys respected, so they would actually listen.)

During the tail end of the "Attitude Era," the kids in attendance at this (and practically any) independent show at this time were obscenely vocal, throwing D-generation X "SUCK IT" groin chops around like it was nothing. But, as usual, we would all comply the best we could; we would

say “yes, of course,” then go out there and pretty much do whatever we usually did anyhow.

Now, Mike Sparta usually ran “double-shots,” meaning he would run on both a Friday and a Saturday. This would save money in flights and make it so he could get the names for his show a little bit cheaper. Sometimes, he would even run triple-shots. Because of this, I will admit, Fonzie and I partied a little too much sometimes.

So on this one show, the loudly dressed karaoke-singing manager Kenny Casanova was managing my opponent, Don Vega, while I was being managed by Bill Alfonso. Because they didn’t have a table there for me to break, someone had found a long wooden bleacher bench, the kind you would find in a locker room. We figured we would use for the finish as a makeshift table to give the audience what they wanted.

Here is the story from my opponent himself, Don Vega, of a match that kind of left a bad taste in both of our mouths…

DON VEGA – GUEST PUKE PASSAGE

When I was informed by the promoter of WWA that I would be wrestling a well-known wrestler by the name of “Sabu” at an upcoming event in Burlington, Vermont, I was excited. Sabu was quickly becoming an established legend, and I was looking forward to getting to work with him, again.

The day of the event, I picked Sabu up at the Logan International Airport in Boston, MA to start the six-hour journey over to the upcoming show that evening. Also traveling with me was my father and girlfriend, who so happened to be eight months pregnant. Due to that wonderful convenience, I was more nervous about her going into labor during the trip than I was about actually wrestling a big name like Sabu.

I had already had the pleasure of working with Sabu a while back when he had first torn his bicep. It was a little scary that first time because his arm was involuntarily twitching both before and during the whole match. That, of course, was a bit disturbing, but little did I know what was “coming up” for me this time around.

Bennington, VT was a small little shithole of a town. We stopped at the only place we could find for something to eat, *which ended up being a questionable deli*. After that, we drove down the road and pulled into the venue of the show.

Once there, we were greeted by the very accommodating and nurturing promoter, Mike Sparta. Sparta was known in that region for having more than one screw loose. Regardless of how comical it might sound, he was also the one running the show and you had to humor him.

After his warm greeting of “You mother fuckas,” he explained to me that he wanted Sabu and me to wrestle in a hardcore match - but that was not all. He also wanted me to portray a new character he called, “The Executioner.” His idea was that he wanted to drop hints to the audience that I was actually D-Lo Brown, due to my resemblance to the other more recognizable wrestler.

“But Mike,” I said. “*I’m Puerto Rican, and D-Lo is black*.”

He looked me once over and shook his head.

“That doesn’t matter!” he said. “These stupid cock suckahs won’t be able to tell the difference. They will actually think you are D-Lo under the

mask!”

“You think so?” I asked.

“I know so,” he said. “They will love it. They will think they are getting another name on the show.”

Of course, this was nothing short of being “brilliant.” Scumbag promoters everywhere throughout time have tried to fool fans into believing a lesser-known wrestler was someone he wasn’t. That idea was nothing new.

In the same vein as Dusty Rhodes getting fired and returning as the Midnight Rider, Sparta hoped that his “simple-minded” fans would buy what he was selling. If I went out there shaking my head like D-Lo teasing the reveal of my true identity, it would be a “great catch” that would really build the audience.

“Of course, the mask isn’t coming off and the fans will never see who it really is anyhow, so it really doesn’t matter,” Sparta explained.

Typical scumbag logic right there, right?

To add to the ridiculousness of the night, I was also being appointed manager Kenny Casanova to even the odds against Sabu’s manager Bill Alfonso, and break balls to no end.

The music finally hit. Nobody made the convoluted connection that I was really a masked D-Lo Brown, so I stopped playing it up. We started our match just like any normal one.

Everything started out just fine. It began with an exchange of solid wrestling holds. It eventually escalated into Sabu doing his signature springboard leg drop onto me, along with a dive. Once the cut-off point of the match approached, I hit the ropes and rushed at my opponent with my arm out.

Now, this was not to be your average “Clothesline from Hell,” however. This one was more like a “Clothesline with Smell.”

You see, a split second before it connected, I saw a projectile streak of puke emit from his mouth, flying straight at me.

It was too late.

Disgustingly enough, at the moment of impact, Sabu’s barf launched directly at the mouth area of my mask. While this particular mask protected my identity, it did not protect me against puke.

All at once, the largest spurt of vomit went directly into my mouth.

I immediately tried to spit it out, but the mask didn't allow for easy exit. Some of it went down. It was beefy, cheesy, chunky, salty, and sour all at the same time. (You are welcome.)

If that wasn't bad enough… before I could wallow in self-pity, I realized that something else was still wrong. Sabu fell over. As we both continued to spit down at the mat, he looked like he was going to die right next to me. He continued to heave in the middle of the ring, before eventually crawling toward the apron. He was trying with all his might to breathe and get out, gasping for air.

Before ducking under the ropes for his grand exit, Sabu stopped on his knees. He was coughing, and I feared the worst. I took it upon myself to club him really good on the back before he could out. Now, in wrestling that's pretty common, but in this instance, I was actually hitting him on the back to save him from choking on his own vomit.

Sabu finally staggered over to his manager, Bill Alfonso, for a pep talk and maybe some Pepto Bismol. I rolled out of the ring on the other side, in turn, towards my manager, Kenny Casanova, to regroup. Kenny was laughing hysterically.

"Dude," he said under his breath. "Did he just barf in your mouth?!"

"Yes," I said. "What the fuck?!"

"Sorry man. I don't think he was planning on puking, but then something SUDDENLY CAME UP."

I looked at Kenny like I was going to kill him. That was no time for a joke. He knew I was not happy, and continued.

"Too soon? Was that in POOR TASTE?" Kenny asked.

He just couldn't help himself. Kenny knew that the odds of you downing a shot of puke as you were attempting to clothesline someone must be like hitting the lottery. I guess I was just that lucky.

I gave Sabu a few moments to get his bearings back, as I needed time too. It could have easily turned into a contagious bout of barfing between the both of us, as I was still dry heaving at the very thought of what had just happened.

Referee Sal Gilberto almost counted to ten then ducked under the ropes from in the ring to break his own count. He looked at us and called for the match to continue saying, "Okay guys. Get back in the ring. This time… chunks count anywhere."

Two jokes in like twenty seconds from two different guys? I was doomed. It was then that I knew I would never live this down.

Once we calmed down our stomachs, we both managed to climb back into the ring to finish the match. As they say, "…the show must go on," so it did. We rushed through to the end and ran back to the locker room.

Mike Sparta was right there waiting in the locker room for us. I guess the match left a bad taste in his mouth, too. He was pretty upset with Sabu and gave him a mouthful. I'm not going to lie, I was upset as well, but I also realized that accidents do happen.

Sabu was evidently very embarrassed and very apologetic. Bill Alfonso laughed a little about it to try to lighten the situation, as did my managerial counterpart.

"Sabu," Kenny asked. "What did you eat for lunch?"

"A cheeseburger sub and a banana milkshake," he replied.

"Was it good?" Kenny asked, only asking me - not Sabu.

What a bastard. (This was just the beginning, too. Kenny would rib me for the next 15 years whenever he could until he finally contacted me about putting the story it in this book! Even today, he's still "throwing up" even more dumb puke jokes.)

Sabu and I had our after-match conversation in the showers. I went in with all my gear on. I wanted that shit off me ASAP. Sabu was still very embarrassed and very apologetic. He couldn't just go and hide. He still had a six-hour ride back to the hotel with me to Boston!

He's a super nice guy though. The whole trip, he really wanted to make it up to me.

"If you want, stop somewhere nice for dinner, he said. "It's on me."

I wanted to say, "Thanks, but I already ate," but I let it go. I mean, the guy was offering to buy me dinner. I guess it was only fair, though. After all, *Sabu's lunch was on me.*

I don't think we stopped for food. Man, my appetite was just gone after that.

Years later, people in wrestling still continue to "bring up" this story and pretty much "regurgitate" bits of truth and bits of fiction about what actually happened that night. Hopefully, this finally sets the record straight. Since then, Sabu and I have gone on to have other matches as recent as August 2017. He's honestly one of the best in the business ever, bar none.

His contribution to modern day wrestling is unparalleled by any. Today, this is a story that we can just look back on and have a good laugh about."

— Don Vega



WWA & MORE INDIE SHIT AGAIN

Working for Mike Sparta was a trip. I remember one weekend, I did a double shot for him, but only got half of the money we had agreed on.

Sparta made some kind of lame excuse that he was going to need to bring in a good name to get enough money so he could pay me what he owed me. To do "my share," I needed to help him book Scott Hall.

"Look, Sabu. I just can't pay you unless you get me that Scott Hall," he said on my voicemail the next week. "You need to do your part, too."

This mentality made no sense because I had already done my part and wrestled on his show for him, twice. But either way, I tried to get Scotty anyhow. The problem was, he was, like, $10,000, and there was no way Sparta was ever going to get up that kind of money to make it happen.

Chris Candido used to tell a funny story about Sparta and his shady ways. In many interviews including one with Highspots, he explained how Sparta booked him, Sandman and myself in a three-way dance he called the "Triple H" match. However, the reason he called it that had nothing to do with the wrestler by the same name. Candido rather called the match "Triple

H” because the H stood for heroin, which allegedly was the kind of payment that Sparta was hoping to use that night for the payoff.

“Look, you bastids,” he said, seeing one of us taking a pain pill in the back. “Those don’t do shit. You need to stop taking pills and start taking the china white.”

Sandman laughed.

“There just ain’t no money tonight,” Chris said that Sparta explained. “But I can pay you in the real good shit.”

“Look, Mike. That’s all fine and good, and I may even want to buy some of it after the show tonight, but you can’t pay me all in drugs,” he said. “I mean, that stuff doesn’t get my bills paid. When I go down to pay my phone bill, I can’t take out a pill bottle and count out a certain number of them to cover my balance.”

“Just sell it,” he allegedly said. “You know you can make your money back.”

“I’m not a drug dealer, Mike!”

Sparta’s promotion is a perfect example of what I would call “indy nonsense.” When you wrestle on the independents, you just never know what you are going to get. They aren’t all bad, though. Sometimes you can make even more on the indies than you can for a big promotion that has a TV deal.

One of the better independent promotions I worked for was not too long ago, for PCW in Arlington, TX for a guy named Walter Bussy. The arena was an old theater and 500 people looked like 5,000 the way they had it set up, and it always sold out. The dressing room was in a real gym, and it was set up super nice. It looked like The Sportatorium in Dallas, but better. They focused on the wrestling, and they always treated me and the other wrestlers like kings.

Now, the worst of recent memory was probably the last week or so this past July. They were paying $1,000 and got it to me in full in advance which was great. However, when I got there, I didn’t even want to work the show it was so bad. The ring was in a backyard that had a leashed goat in the corner. We had to make our entrance from their garage, and get dressed in a van. We performed in front of two rows of lawn chairs. It was absolutely horrible, but I had to do it because they prepaid.





CHAPTER 14 – TNA IMPACT!

Jerry Jarrett, the father of Jeff Jarrett, is a legendary wrestling promoter. He was first known for being the founder of the Memphis wrestling organization, CWA, which later became USWA. Years later, he became the co-founder of another promotion, TNA Wrestling, which later became Impact Wrestling. He saw something in me and pulled me to TNA.

Jerry started me out with some one-shots to see what I could do. I debuted in TNA on July 17, 2002, defeating a guy named Malice in a ladder match. The next week on July 24, 2002, he had me take on Ken Shamrock in a ladder match. Jerry was very complimentary of me after both of my matches, and it was no surprise when he called me into his office to discuss a contract. He said I was one of the best he had ever seen.

During our meeting, Jerry seemed a little off explained that the other agents really didn't have the same passion as he did to sign me, but he didn't care. He said he was going to follow his heart. He was a big fan of my work and felt I would be the perfect fit with the promotion. He clearly wasn't feeling well, so I told him to go take care of whatever was wrong.

"I don't feel very well," he said, holding his chest.

I didn't sign the contract that day, but I should have. We had to cut things short, and I told him to go get himself looked at because it looked like he was having a heart attack. He thanked me for allowing the reschedule.

"Following his heart," turned out to be pretty ironic phrasing from him, because his heart was going to lead him right out of the office and right into a hospital.

They actually rushed him right into a triple bypass!

He was down and out — and so was I — without a contract.

I bounced around from promotion to promotion and was able to make some good money as an unsigned but still hot free agent. Back in my "King of the Independents" mode, I took a lot of high-profile bookings all over the place. These included a quick tour in Europe, and I even worked RVD on a spot show for All Japan.

It would be another year or so before I would get back to TV again on TNA. The last time around, Dixie Carter, the owner, fell into the same category as the other agents who didn't really care for me. That list at the time included Terry Taylor, Eric Bischoff, Bruce Prichard, and Vince Russo.

However, her father, Robert (the real money behind the operation) he did like me. Eventually, it became pretty common knowledge that Robert didn't go to any TNA shows unless I had a match on it. For some reason, he was a big Sabu fan. Even though Dixie didn't take her dad's side when it came to me in the ring, she pulled me back into the promotion on his request.

REINVENTING HISTORY

In 2004, I got to talking with Raven in the locker room. We were always friendly in ECW, but we never worked together there. Raven went to the booking committee to tell them we should probably work a program together, or else we were leaving money on the table.

They agreed.

After that, we decided to try to bring some of the special ECW magic of the long build-up to Taz by means of a similar feud to TNA. The idea was I would eventually have to wrestle Raven, but something would keep us apart a long time before I could eventually get to him.

The internet by this point was starting to affect the way we booked matches. Fans everywhere wanted to be on the inside and constantly read up on wrestling news to debunk whatever promotions were up to, as to feel like they knew more than the "average fan." We decided to use this to our advantage. The idea was to work in as much realism as possible into the "Raven never faced Sabu" angle, borrowing nostalgic elements of my history to help create a buzz.

First, I worked with Raven's lackeys; CM Punk and Julio Dinero. That booking idea could only go so far, however, but the writing of this angle would end up being actually quite good despite your average typical TNA shortcomings at the time. I think Raven had a lot to do it.

So, eventually, Raven was stripped of his "flock" when his new Gathering, consisting of Julio Dinero, CM Punk, and Alexis Laree (Mickie James) had left him for the leadership of James Mitchell. Much like teaming with Taz some in ECW first, the idea was a Sabu/Raven alliance would make it more personal when Raven finally turned on me.

We went for the slow burn heel turn. The idea was I would join my ECW alumni, Raven, which would make sense to fans. We must be friends because we were both in ECW, right? It only would make sense that Raven would want to have my back. So we formed a temporary alliance. But that agreement would be revealed to be just head games from Raven, as guys like Abyss and Monty Brown (who, incidentally was one of my favorite and best students) would attack me with Raven nowhere to be found.

Eventually, come June 9, 2004, on pay-per-view, it opened with Raven sitting in an empty ring. Raven had challenged me to an Empty Arena match. Later in the night, they showed me sitting in the dressing room, looking at a picture of my uncle. Fans knew my family's history, but they didn't know where we were going with this.

Later that night, Raven revealed to Shane Douglas in an interview that we never had a match together. "In ECW, I begged Heyman to face Sabu and I think it never happened because Sabu was afraid of me," Raven said to Shane. Raven then also revealed that him having a match with me was the only real reason he helped bring me into TNA in the first place. He said he wanted it so bad that he even promised to retire if he could just have one match with me.

Sonjay Dutt (another Middle-eastern wrestler in the mix who was then aligned with me) came to the ring and told Raven the secret as to why I would not face him all these years. "It was actually because of a promise." Raven then attacked Dutt and handcuffed him to a ring post. He called for me again, saying, "Promises were made to be broken," as I came out to save Sonjay.

It was then revealed that this mysterious promise was one that Raven and I made to The Sheik, "the same man who had trained us both." You see, we promised to my uncle to never ever fight each other in a match.

Of course, there was no "promise." If there had been, it would have made more sense for the promise to be with me and RVD, right? In reality, behind the scenes, Raven had actually met up with The Sheik early on and learned a few things from him, but The Sheik wasn't ever really his official trainer. This was all made up for TV.

Because of this storyline, a lot of people back then (and to this very day) still think that my uncle was Raven's trainer, but that's not true. Scott Levy had been formally trained by Larry Sharpe at the Monster Factory in New

Jersey with some help from Charlie Fulton. He did get some ideas and psychology from both Jake Roberts and The Sheik at the start of his career, taking down heel notes from each to use as inspiration. However, his formal training was really from Larry Sharpe.

The next week, we went with the start of this whole proxy angle where Raven would continue to take things out on Sonjay, just to get at me. He said he would, "…destroy Sonjay if it means that Sabu will finally face me. Want to know why? Because while promises were made to be broken, so are bones." Classic Scotty, right?

For one match, Raven attacked Sonjay from behind and taped his hands together. Then, as a twisted reverse tribute to The Sheik, he jabbed Sonjay in the head with a screwdriver, much like his trademark spike. This touch was great to add to some realism and history to the angle that the fans grabbed onto. Raven then grabbed a microphone to call me out over and over while issuing more punishment to poor Sonjay. After the match, Raven taped Sonjay's feet together and forced him to call me for help. When I finally came to the ring, Raven slapped me and tried to provoke me into fighting him, which I still wouldn't do. Raven called me a coward as security separated us, and then we added more nostalgia. Dusty Rhodes, a personal friend of my late uncle, came out to ringside to bitch Raven out for disrespecting The Sheik.

These real "history repeating itself" moments were all about suspending disbelief.

The next few weeks, Raven mockingly paid tribute to The Sheik by hanging a mannequin from the ceiling dressed as him. He also had a Sheik imposter appear by the entrance to interrupt my matches with Raven saying over the PA: "Actually, it's not him Sabu. He is just dead."

Pulling more from my past and the idea that Raven and I were forbidden to fight due to a promise from my uncle, one of the bookers, Scott D'Amore, decided to dig up someone else from The Sheik's past. Enter Irish Mickey Doyle, Detroit native and a guy I wrestled for Bearman.

After working Florida in the late 60s and the Midwest into the 70s, Mickey Doyle worked some with top talent like Bruno Sammartino in Pittsburgh. As a bit of a journeyman like myself, he popped up all over the place and helped get a lot of guys over. He then eventually headed back

home to Sheik’s territory in Detroit. Since my uncle had crossed paths with him some early on, he gave him a job.

“When I went back to Detroit, I worked a lot at Big Time with one of The Sheik's boys, Fred Curry,” Mickey says. “I worked both babyface and heel there, and happy to be back home and do whatever they wanted with me.”

Mickey Doyle was a good fit for this. His roots were traceable to Michigan. Another reason he was a great choice to be brought in to console me over Raven disgracing my family name was simple. Besides, Doyle was one of the few left from that era, and one of the bookers also knew him well.

Mickey knew how to work. He bumped hard and was both a great singles and tag wrestler. He also was a great teacher for the new guys, always willing to help out. I learned a lot from working with him early on in Canada.

He left Detroit for a while in the 80s but eventually returned to new faces. Upon his return to Detroit, he decided to do what many said he did best again, and that was to tag team. Doyle was then made the fifth Kangaroo alongside Al Costello, working promotions around Detroit and Canada, eventually for Bearman. The future connection to TNA came when Doyle tagged with the very-green-at-the-time Al Snow. They were known in that region as the “Motor City Hitmen.”

Also around this time, a very young to the business Scott D'Amore had started up a promotion called “Border City Wrestling” and Doyle was The Border City Can-Am champion. Behind the scenes, Doyle teamed up with D'Amore to help him establish a training facility that would generate supplemental income for the promotion. They called it “The Can-Am Wrestling School.” There, Doyle and D’Amore would go on to train wrestlers who would eventually go on to become TNA names. These names included guys like Rhino, Chris Sabin, and Petey Williams.

“We had a gym in Windsor that some of the locals and myself worked out at,” says D’Amore. “They had a ring to work out in and we got very good experienced wrestlers to train with. Mickey started coming over and working out with us in it to show us the ropes. It was a great, because I was still very green, myself.”

As you can see, choosing Mickey Doyle to be my throwback mentor in this feud was an interesting choice. He tied back to my roots with my uncle,

and he also had a number of connections to the early roots of TNA. While your average wrestling fans may not have appreciated this connection, wrestling historians would. Keeping some realism in this storyline is what made it memorable to me.

After “consoling with my mentor,” the history-rich storyline continued in a “This is your Life” fashion. Sonjay took a lot of abuse from Raven, and it made sense that I had finally been broken down enough to realize that my family name the current situation was more important than a promise made many years ago. Mike Tenay came out and finally announced, “Sabu has accepted Raven’s challenge for one match, and one match only!”

To make for good television, upon this revelation, Raven came out to the ring dressed as The Sheik himself, mocking him. “This match will be under my rules,” he said, in his perfect showmanship style that made him famous. He then pulled off The Sheik regalia and stuffed it into a trash can, intending to burn it. Realizing that he didn’t have any kindling around for his little makeshift-campfire, he started digging around under the ring. Now, typically, one might expect a wrestler to pull out a kendo stick, a wooden table or folding chair, but that is not what this search produced. At this point in time, Raven pulled out a body bag. When he opened it up, the crowd was surprised to see that it was stuffed with Sonjay Dutt!

Attacking my Middle Eastern buddy was the straw that broke the camel’s back, pardon the pun. As Raven mashed Dutt deep down into the garbage can for disposal, he started to douse him and everything in it with gasoline. Before he could light the fire, however, I ran down to the ring to finally settle things with the twisted Raven by means of violence, “against my uncle’s wishes.”

Our match took place the next week and got off to a fast start. Raven came out again dressed up as The Sheik, and I went right at him with a screwdriver. I went through a table. Raven went through a table. Then, Raven finally put me through a third table and got the pinfall win.

As a rule, you never want the babyface to get a pinfall victory in their first encounter with their foil. Looking back at some really good classic ECW booking involving Raven himself, you can see why this is, perhaps, very clearly.

TOMMY DREAMER VS. RAVEN

All bookers will agree that the number one way to make money in professional wrestling is with a great feud. Nothing draws bigger at the box office than a rivalry pitting good vs. evil. To better understand why TNA booked my feud as they did with Raven, it makes sense to look at how ECW booked Tommy Dreamer's feud with him, as well.

For a time, there was a very heated feud going on between Raven and Tommy Dreamer. Tommy Dreamer vs. Raven lasted much longer than the one-year build up I had with Taz. The Dreamer/Raven thing turned into the longest-running feud in ECW history. Starting back in 1995 it continued all the way into 2000. Not enough credit is given to Dreamer, Raven, and Paul Heyman for seeing this out without giving in on the vision and just letting Dreamer get his moment of payback. It is quite impressive if you think about it, how they were able to sustain fan interest for such a long period of time.

When you go back and look at it, the bullet points of their feud look rather ridiculous with all the plot twists and turns. But their ability to tell a story, with all the emotion, the intensity, and the hate that they were able to display in the ring speaks miles about the overall storytelling abilities of both Raven and Dreamer.

Dreamer and Raven worked with each other at least once just about every weekend for almost two years in every single kind of match you can think of. Just like my feud with Raven in TNA, Tommy first had to go through Raven's lackeys in ECW, before he could get even to him. Raven's followers allowed opportunities for Dreamer to at least exact some revenge on the bWo, Beulah McGullicutty, and even Mick Foley. However, Dreamer was never able to actually beat Raven. When Tommy finally got his hands on Raven though, he never ever won, and this was by design.

The reason for this was that if Tommy had given the fans what they wanted and subsequently beat Raven in the middle of the ring, there would be no reason left for fans to come out and see them. Tommy would have exacted his revenge, and the feud would have been over. This would have meant no more main events, and less money for both the promotion and the

two wrestlers involved. Keeping the carrot dangling but just far enough away that the horse couldn't get his mouth on it was just the tease that the audience needed to make them keep coming back for more.

It was genius.

Tommy says in interviews that there was a period in time where Paul was ready to let Tommy win, but he actually refused *to not do the job.* It is funny that you would hear that this is the case, because more often than not, wrestlers would argue quite the opposite. However, Tommy knew that the feud meant money with him never beating Raven and that is exactly what they did for over two years.

END OF MY FEUD WITH RAVEN

The next week, we began what was supposed to become a long series of losses for me in every match you could imagine, to do something mirroring Tommy's run with Raven. After Raven's head games, hanging dummies of my uncle from the rafters to mock his death, I looped a chain around Raven's neck and dragged him out to the ring to hang him over the top rope. Raven fought back until Sonjay Dutt came out with security to stop the killing.

Later in the night, Raven announced that he would fight me in a "Hangman's Horror" match next week. The rules for this first of many specialty matches with me were that it would only end when someone was hung over the top rope until they passed out.

This was to be the start of what would have made for some really good television and some great exposure for both of us. However, I guess it just wasn't in the cards. All of our plans were put on hold as I had reinjured my neck at a house show over the weekend.

My injury was bad. TNA knew they had to scramble to bring some kind of closure to the feud, at least for the time being, because I was ordered to stay out of the ring for at least four months. Raven came out the next week and opened the show by saying I was faking an injury because I was afraid. He threw out an open challenge for the match, so Sonjay appeared and accepted.

After a decent match, they went into the realism realm one last time for the booking of the finish. Sonjay took a page out of my uncle's book and

threw a Sheik fireball in Raven’s face. He hung him over the top rope and Raven was rendered unconscious.

That was the rushed end of the angle. We left a lot of money on the table, but there was nothing else we could really do. Now, want the real reason for telling this story? To make matters worse, while recovering from my neck/back injury, I had contracted some kind of mysterious virus. Nobody really knew at the time exactly what it was. It nearly ended my career. I was hospitalized, and things looked bad.

So I while I was injured, this unknown mystery virus came out of nowhere and made things even worse as far as a comeback was concerned. There was a period of time when wrestling was the furthest thing from my mind; I was hoping to just live a normal life again.

I was practically paralyzed.

SABU APPRECIATION NIGHT

Eventually, the AWWL/BTW promotion (with promoter Scott D'Amore) decided to throw a show to raise funds for me. I really wasn’t crazy about “A Night of Appreciation for Sabu.” I didn’t like the idea of being looked at potentially being a charity-case in the eyes of fans. Being old school, you never wanted to look weak. So when they first contacted me about the idea, I said “no.” Absoultely, no.

However, a lot of my buddies insisted I allow it and gave the promotion the go-ahead on my behalf for the show to happen anyhow. Along with Scott D'Amore setting things up behind the scenes, both professional wrestling manager Jimmy Hart and Raven had a big hand in making things come together. (I’m still super grateful to these three today.)

So, on December 12, 2004, their efforts took place at the Diamondback Saloon in Belleville, Michigan. It was on. “A Night of Appreciation” was created out of pure selfless empathy; a professional wrestling benefit show solely created held to raise funds for my medical bills.

The event was packed and its turnout was very humbling for me. It drew 700 people with standing room only, and then many more people were turned away because there just wasn’t enough room for seating. The gate

was good. Tickets were priced at $15 for adults and $10 for children, with a limited amount VIP seating (plus an autograph session) at $30 each. A lot of the boys came out to help me out. With Jimmy Hart as the emcee and Bobby Clancy as the ring announcer, most of the card featured matches with a lot of familiar faces. Some of them came from the Ontario-based Border City Wrestling promotion, but many wrestlers from TNA (where I was working before having to take time off) showed their support. And yet, even others like the Insane Clown Posse and ECW names like Raven, Shane Douglas, and Mick Foley threw their names into the hat as well.

In a sport where it is often “every man for himself” when it came to money, each and every one of the performers worked for free that night, including Mick Foley, who has the deepest pockets in the sport and was known as “The King of The Spendthrifts” to many. Every wrestler paid their own travel costs. The venue costs, the lighting and sound equipment, and even the ring itself were all provided by people who cared free-of-charge that night. Amazing.

During intermission, wrestlers and fans had donated items that were auctioned and raffled off to help the cause. And just as they had promised, the entire proceeds of the event were given entirely to me. Even though I was humble and didn’t want the help initially, it helped tremendously.



WE LOVE SABU SHOW

Cactus Jack is a cheap, cheap guy with a very generous heart. I mean, he still holds the world wrestler's record of spending only $200 for a whole 5 weeks living in Japan. I didn't ask for another benefit show. When I heard he was putting up some very expensive items to help woman wrestler Sumie Sakai organize another benefit in my name, I tried to refuse it. They wouldn't take no for an answer and eventually talked me into going. I sat ringside the whole show with the fans.

Two more benefit shows happened on April 17, 2005, in Tokyo at the Differ Ariake arena back to back. The "We Love Sabu" shows drew high-paying crowds of 303 fans for the afternoon show and 501 for the evening show. Sumie Sakai was the promoter and she booked many of the former

FMW wrestlers to participate in the show, including Hayabusa, Masato Tanaka, Mr. Gannosuke, Megumi Kudo, Kintaro Kanemura, Tetsuhiro Kuroda, Mammoth Sasaki, GOEMON, Onryo, Hido, Shark Tsuchiya, Hisakatsu Oya, Ricky Fuji, Miss Mongol, Gosaku Goshogawara and Kaori Nakayama.

April Hunter recalls the event. “I was hoping after the show, that Sumie might be less stressed and be able to remove her phone from her ear, which had now become semi-permanently attached. But she did a great job organizing everything. We rode to the show with her and had a lot of precious cargo on board… like one of Mick Foley's donated Mankind outfits (sweet!), a Socko, and another keepsake from Terry Funk.”

It seems everyone donated something important and the fans were lined up early outside waiting for the “day show.” The turnout for the show was amazing behind the curtain, too. Everyone I worked with in Japan tried to make it out. It really was a who's who of Japanese wrestling and MMA. I was surprised because I wondered how so many wrestlers under contract with different promotions were able to be on this show!

In Japan, at this point in time, the major promotions in order were: New Japan and NOAH (compare them both to WWE), and then secondly All Japan (compare to TNA). Then you have minors like Pro Wrestling Zero1-Max, Michinoku Pro and Dragon Gate (which you can compare to ROH) followed by small independent promotions like DDT. This show surprisingly was so organized and had top name wrestlers from all of those promotions all together, *for me.*

Backstage, Hayabusa showed up in his wheelchair to say hello to me. That too was a super nice gesture on his behalf. It was a huge success and they raised even more money towards my ridiculously high hospital bills! Believe it or not, more money helped pay for more medical help, and I eventually went on to make a complete recovery!

It didn’t take long to get the ball back rolling. I returned to the ring on May 21, 2005, in my first match back since the injury as a favor to the AWWL/BTW, for all they had done for me. I worked off my ring rust by defeating a good guy named N8 Mattson. Since fans didn’t want to see a less-than-hard-hitting Sabu in the ring, I didn’t pussyfoot around with the way I was accepting my bookings. As always, I went at things wrestling full force.

Right away, I was appearing at *Hardcore Homecoming* where I defeated Terry Funk and Shane Douglas in a brutal three-way, no-ropes, barbwire match. Then, soon after that, I was off to a one-shot for WWE's presentation of *ECW: One Night Stand* only two days later, defeating Rhino.

I knew I couldn't slow down. I had to keep things going to play catch-up and make sure I wasn't forgotten by anybody. However, when I was finally well enough to get back in the ring at TNA to pick up where I had left off, my feud with Raven had already been forgotten.

LESS OF AN IMPACT

Come July 29, 2005, they decided to throw me into *TNA: Sacrifice* teaming up with my old enemy Raven, rather than facing him. We were pitted against Jeff Jarrett and Rhino. The idea behind me not going back into the feud was, for one, they figured it was already out of the viewer's minds. The other reason was that Raven was already in another feud and it would just be too much for the avid TNA watcher to understand. So at Sacrifice, Rhino and Jarrett won the match after Rhino gored Raven through a table. After the match, Abyss (who didn't have a whole lot going on storyline-wise either) attacked me to rather start a feud between the both of us. They bounced me around a little bit, and I had a few matches with Rhino, but nothing of any real substance for television.

I always felt like a bit of an outsider in this company. There were a lot of cliques backstage, and while I knew a lot of the boys, I wasn't really tight with any of them. I mean, yeah, Raven was cool and I would be the first to hire him to run my own wrestling company if I had one. But beyond him, there wasn't a whole lot of advocates in my corner.

After coming up short a lot on the TV side of things, I saw a familiar face one night in the locker room and took him aside to see if he could help.

"What's going on?" I said to Bubba Ray Dudley.

"Not much," he said sarcastically, already assuming I was leading up to a request for a bigger push on TV for my character, knowing Bubba had a voice at the writer's table.

So I didn't beat around the bush and just asked the obvious.

“I’m sorry, man. Your name just isn’t coming up.”

“Do you think you can help make it come up?”

There was no real answer given then, or any time after then. He pretty much kept his mouth shut about trying to help me out. I don’t know if he even could if he wanted to.

All wrestlers can be conspiracy theorists at times for obvious reasons. TNA never capitalizing on very much didn’t seem coincidental to me. If you throw a hundred turds on the wall, at least one of them shits should stick, right? This just never seemed to happen while I was there in the Impact Zone. Nothing ever seemed to have any impact on anything! My thoughts at the time were this: Vince probably paid those guys double what they were making to make shitty decisions to make the company bad. Jeff Jarrett said 500 people could never sell out unless I was on the show.

RUNNING WITH RIC

While at TNA, there was also a silly incident with “The Running Man” Ric Flair that I thought I would take the time to talk about here. Just like WCW, TNA Wrestling at this time had a lot of different people politicking for power. Because the actual owners were not from a wrestling background, they fell back to a number of the veterans to run the shows. It was hard to know exactly who my real boss was at times, but I did have an idea of some of the guys who were pulling strings. Ric Flair at one point was one of these people. It was really fucking weird, though, man. I noticed that whenever Ric was in the locker room and I tried to speak with him, he was always running away from me.

On more than one occasion, I would attempt to talk business with him civilly, and he turned his back to me like he didn’t know I wanted his attention and was off running down a hall somewhere.

“Okay, guys, I have to run,” he would say, after feeling my presence behind his shoulder, waiting my turn to have a word.

“Hold on a second, Ric,” I would say. “Can we talk a minute?”

“Sorry, I really have to run. I’ll get back to you later, Sabu,” he would say, as he was clearly trying to avoid me. “You have my word. TV stuff,

you understand."

However, "later" would never come.

One day when I had finally had enough of the Nature Boy's steaming pile of nature shit, so I finally decided to confront him about this. Just as he was about to make his exit, I stood in front of the doorway and blocked his way.

"Hold up, Ric. Before you run out of here again on me, why is it you always seem to run and hide from me?"

"You want to know?" the Horseman asked, almost in full promo mode and chuckling.

"Yeah," I said.

"You really want to know?"

"Yeah," I said.

"Well, big man. I've never liked you, and I never liked uncle! He was a real piece of shit!" Flair pushed by me and ran down the hall. He was almost strutting in each one of his steps to get away from talking to me once again.

It was then that his hidden avoidance of me was out in the open, so he decided to just make it out like it was a joke to allow his continued disrespect to be okay. However, that bullshit was not okay with me.

Ric knew at this point that I knew what he was up to, so he decided to play it off as an extended rib on me. Whenever I would approach him, the faster I would step his way, the faster and further he would walk away from me.

It may have been funny to others in the locker room the first few times he did it, but they eventually knew it was definitely passive aggressive. He really didn't like my uncle I guess, and in return, he wouldn't show me any respect? That shit wasn't right. No wonder he had like 10 wives.

The dressing room didn't back Flair up on this bullshit. The last time he did, the boys all told me to go after him when he ran, and not to slow down just because of who he was. "Catch up to him and give him a receipt" was the general consensus from the wrestlers. I decided to go for it.

"Hey, Ric," I said one day, knowing he would run.

Predictably, he ran like a bitch. The difference this time was, I didn't care how stupid it looked. I ran right after him. I sprinted after him. He jumped over bags and chairs, but I kept right up with him. Eventually, there was nowhere to run. I strategically cornered him.

He kept his back to me staring at lockers, so I spun him around.

Ric was smart though. He turned on the charisma and made it look like one of his over-the-top ridiculous promos about The Sheik, even though he really didn't like him. Rather than to pop him one for being an asshole, I ended up laughing at his bullshit, just the same as the other guys in locker room. You would be surprised how jealous some of the top guys are. They don't want anyone to be a second to them because they don't want to lose their spot, or share the spotlight. Ric was certainly one of them.

TNA DEPARTURE (2005-2006)

I continued my program with Abyss losing to him at *Genesis* after taking his finisher, the Black Hole Slam, onto a barbed wire steel chair. After that, our rematch was TNA's first ever Barbed Wire Massacre match at *Turning Point*. I finally beat Abyss there and then that was it. The chase was over. It was obvious that I should have pushed to follow Tommy Dreamer's feud philosophy to keep people wanting more. After that, I was just written off of TNA TV for several months.

During this time, I worked a bunch of indies. I worked for Jersey All Pro, 1PW, and Frank Goodman's UXW & USA. For a lot of these matches, I was booked to tag some with Sonjay Dutt, and or to face against my current TNA nemesis, Abyss. (When we weren't shooting TV, we were free to appear wherever we wanted. Therefore, a lot of us would continue our TNA programs elsewhere on the indies.)

On April 15, 2006, I flew down to Mexico City to work with some really big names in Lucha Libre. I was booked for a six-man tag match with Damien 666 and Perro Aguayo Jr. against opponents L.A. Park, Silver King, and Pierroth. We put on a great match, but I left with more than just a decent payday. I had a broken forearm, a severed fingertip, and what people called "a partial scalping from a pretty bad scrape on my head. Web sites said, "Despite the severity of injuries, Sabu will still appear at the TNA pay-per-view *Lockdown* on April 23, 2006. This is certainly a testament towards Sabu's relentless determination to compete, no matter what condition he is in." The real reason had nothing to do with honor, or my wanting to give the fans what they wanted. It was more like, "I needed the money."

I was booked to wrestle with Samoa Joe in a steel cage for the TNA X-Division title. Even though I had a broken forearm and 50 stitches in my head (thanks La Parka!), we did the best we could working around my beat-up condition in a pretty solid six minute match. That would turn out to be my final TNA appearance for that run.

I continued to accept bookings for a number of independent promotions, but I was done with all my obligations to TNA. It was then that I found myself going to a really dark place — one that I thought I would go to. On April 24, 2006, I announced on my own website that I had just signed a three-year contract with the WWE.



ABOUT THOSE “FANS BRING THE WEAPONS” MATCHES…

My first "Fans Bring The Weapons Match" was against Taz in Michigan back around 1994, I think. Fans have been doing it ever since, even when that match isn’t on the card! I have since seen fans offer some really creative gimmicks including: VCRs, toasters, vacuums, cattle prods, dildos, rusty razorblades, and even mace! One time, an old woman in Indiana maced me at ringside, and I had to kayfabe the sting in my eyes to finish the match. (That bitch!) There’s no way I could work that brutal shit into a spot.

But at the same time, I never use weak stuff in these matches, either. In this picture, a fan brought perhaps the weakest shit ever and left it in the can; some Glen Campbell & Conway Twitty albums!

RAVEN on SABU's BIG BALLS

Sabu has bigger balls and more athleticism than any person I've ever seen. He's a funny and intelligent guy, and he gave more to the business than most ever will.

As far as having balls… In a match involving barbed wire, his arm was lacerated so deeply that actual bone was showing. …The bone was actually showing! So what's he do? The one thing no one else would do, he tells Fonzie to run to the back and get a roll of tape so he could tape it shut and continue the match. Get a roll of tape. No fear, no pain, no problem… for Sabu.

Anyone else in that condition would have called for a stretcher, a doctor, or at the very least, for a stop to the fuckin' match, let alone think about finishing the match… Sabu didn't think twice about that bullshit. He matter-of-factly taped his arm shut like it was a mosquito bite, and then proceeded to finish the match, complete with all the death-defying spots you expect from a Sabu match.

WTF? *That is F'N balls!*

As far as athleticism… One time, I was wrestling him and he had a broken arm with a cast on it. The cast went from the bottom of his upper arm to down on his forearm, forcing his arm to be stay at a 90-degree angle.

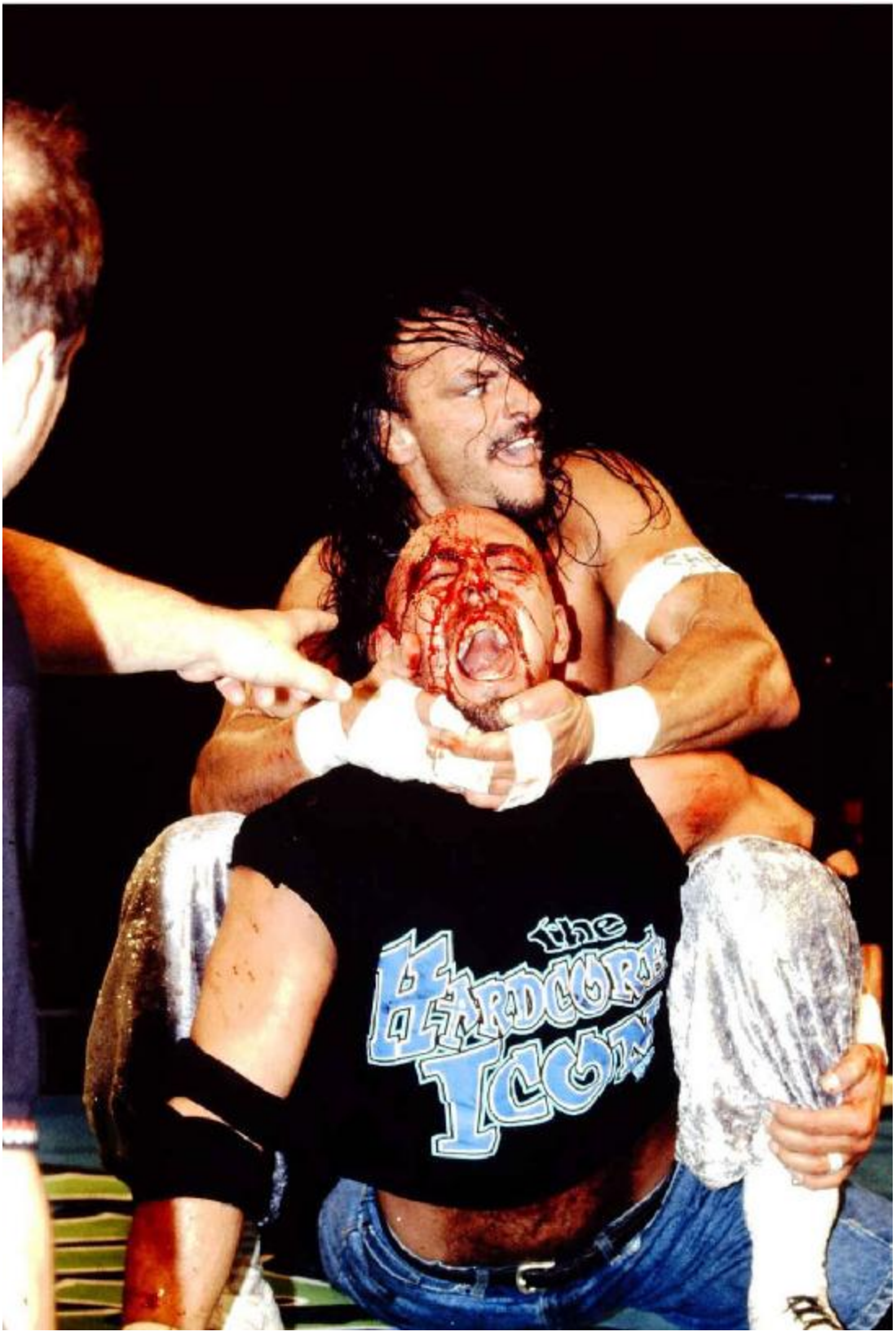
He had me lying in the center of the ring with a chair opened up on one side of me. He hit the ropes, jumped on the chair, then leaped from the chair onto the top rope where he balanced himself for a few seconds before leaping off. He did a flip in mid-air, I moved, and he landed by somersaulting and rolled right up to his feet. Maybe we've seen a few people who can do this, but Sabu did it all with a cast on his arm, his arm bent at 90-degrees, his arm basically useless.

WTF? *That is F'N athletic!*

I got a million Sabu stories but I'll leave it at just this because it's the most important thing. He's a genuinely great guy and I'm proud to be his friend! Although, just how we became friends, well that's a whole other story…

Quote the Raven, nevermore!

- RAVEN


the
HARDCORE
ICON

JUSTIN CREDIBLE on SABU IN WWE

Sabu has such a unique way of handling himself in the ring. He'd hurt himself before he'd ever hurt whoever he was in the ring facing. That thoughtfulness and generosity in itself is a rarity in this business. Another thing worth noting, that even when he was really not feeling his best, he would transform himself last minute to make sure that the fans got his best — and put on the very best match that he could.

One night, I was working with him in the WWE. It was much like any other, only this one was a house show right up near where I lived.

I caught up with the man himself in the locker room. He just got there. He was rolling in his luggage and he looked a little off. He looked as if he had an injury, or maybe he was just physically drained from the night before. I don’t know. But I could see that something wasn’t quite right.

“Hey, Sabu!” I ran up and hugged him. Sabu wasn’t a man of many words, but that was okay. “How are you feeling today?”

“I’m okay,” he said.

No matter how beat up he was, he never complained about what was bugging him, he was that professional. So I walked with him some and then decided to talk a little about the match that we were getting ready to have.

“Hey, man,” I would say. “Any ideas for tonight?”

If you were a fly on the wall, immediately after that, you would think that Sabu started “speaking in tongues.” He didn’t just go into lockup, hip toss, armbar, or something generic like that. It was like he started talking another language or something.

So there Sabu was, explaining how we would start off slow, but then how we would “kick the gas.” After that, it was always tough to keep up with his vision, but I knew one thing, Sabu was going to be flying all around the ring.

It always sounded awesome. I would try to follow, and usually get most of it figured out. Then, just as I thought I had it all, he would go on to tell me even more of the craziest things I have ever heard of doing in the ring, and his vision of how the match should go. Now more importantly for this story, once again, keep in mind that Sabu was coming up with these insane scenarios all while he was clearly in some kind of pain.

“Are you sure, man?” I’d ask. “We can take it easy tonight if you need to.”

Sabu tilted his head as if to say, *“Sabu doesn’t take it easy.”*

He shook his head. Once we agreed on everything, he went to sit in a chair for a time, then eventually curled up into a ball over in the corner to rest up for his performance. Sleeping on the floor was a way for Sabu to recharge his batteries, I think, and it always seemed to work.

A few minutes before the match, he woke up. I think we went over some of it with an agent, then we were all good to go.

I could see that he was still in pain, but then he started to get into his pre-match rituals and literally shook it off. He went from showing some level of agony to walking out of that curtain as a totally refreshed and recharged warrior. He could always transform just like that into the superstar that he is. I have never seen someone in such tremendous pain be able to flip the switch and go out there so energized and give the crowd a show quite like Sabu.

As Sabu walked the aisle, he heard the people. The crowd roared and chanted. It woke him up. He fed off it.

As a wrestler, I can see how seeing him injured before a match could make you nervous, but I knew he would be there for me. He never hurt me no matter how injured he might be. I knew he would be up to capacity before the bell. He always was and he was on this night, too.

Once the bell rang, it was on. We went through all of our stuff, then there was this one spot where he was going to hit me three times. That, if any place, I knew would be the only place in the match were something might get a little stiff. Sabu had a reputation for laying in that third punch snug sometimes.

It's actually funny because, if you have ever worked with Sabu before, you know exactly what I mean. Just like in any other match, he punched me twice. Those first two shots were fine because of the fact that they barely touched me. However, on that final third punch, before he would even hit me, he apologized.

“Sorry!”

And… *BAM!* Yeah, hit me hard after that. It was always funny to hear a guy apologize for a potato that he hadn’t even throw yet. He knew he was

going to throw it, and I knew it was coming, though. That's just how he rolled.

Anyhow, we had a great match as usual. Sabu was always the best. He could have taken it easy because it wasn't TV, it was a house show, and he wasn't feeling well, but that wasn't how Sabu worked.

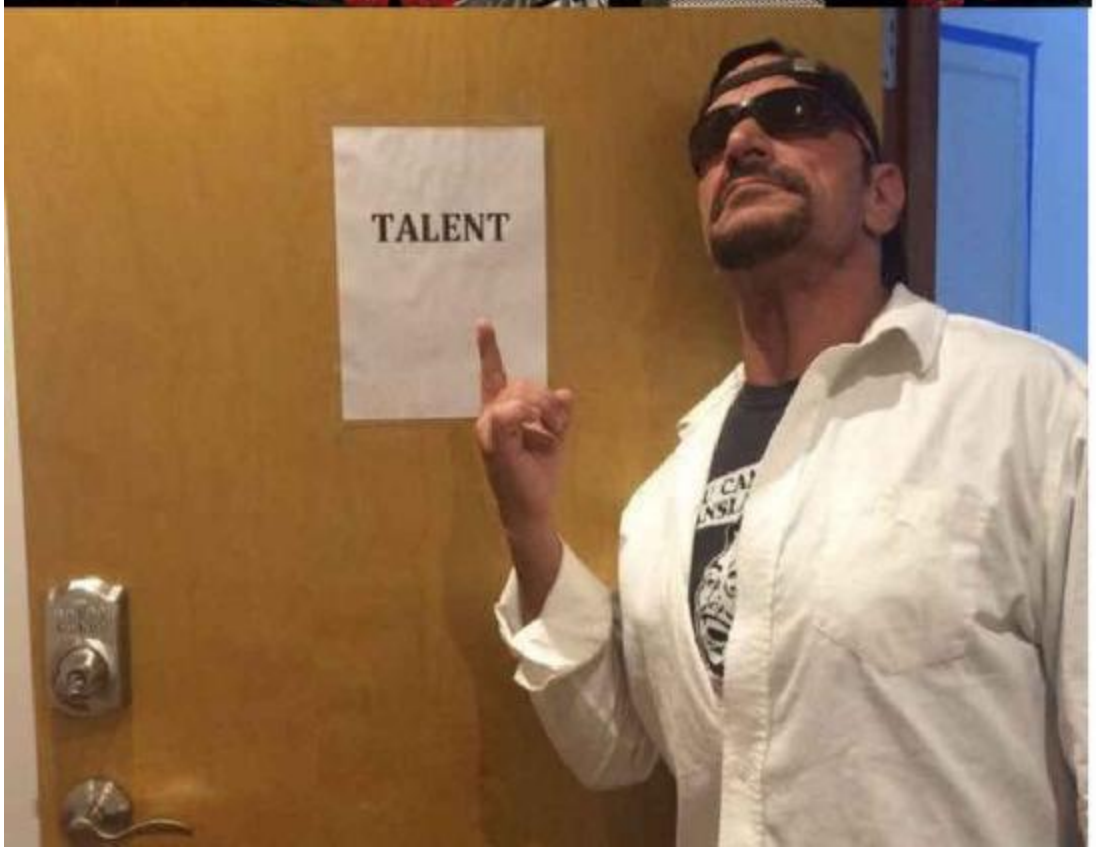
Later that night, I had Sabu save his hotel money and just stay the night at my house. We had such a fun Sunday before our RAW taping the next nigh day. The funniest part about it was seeing the "Suicidal, Homicidal" Sabu, this big bad monster, sitting on the couch and playing with my dog.

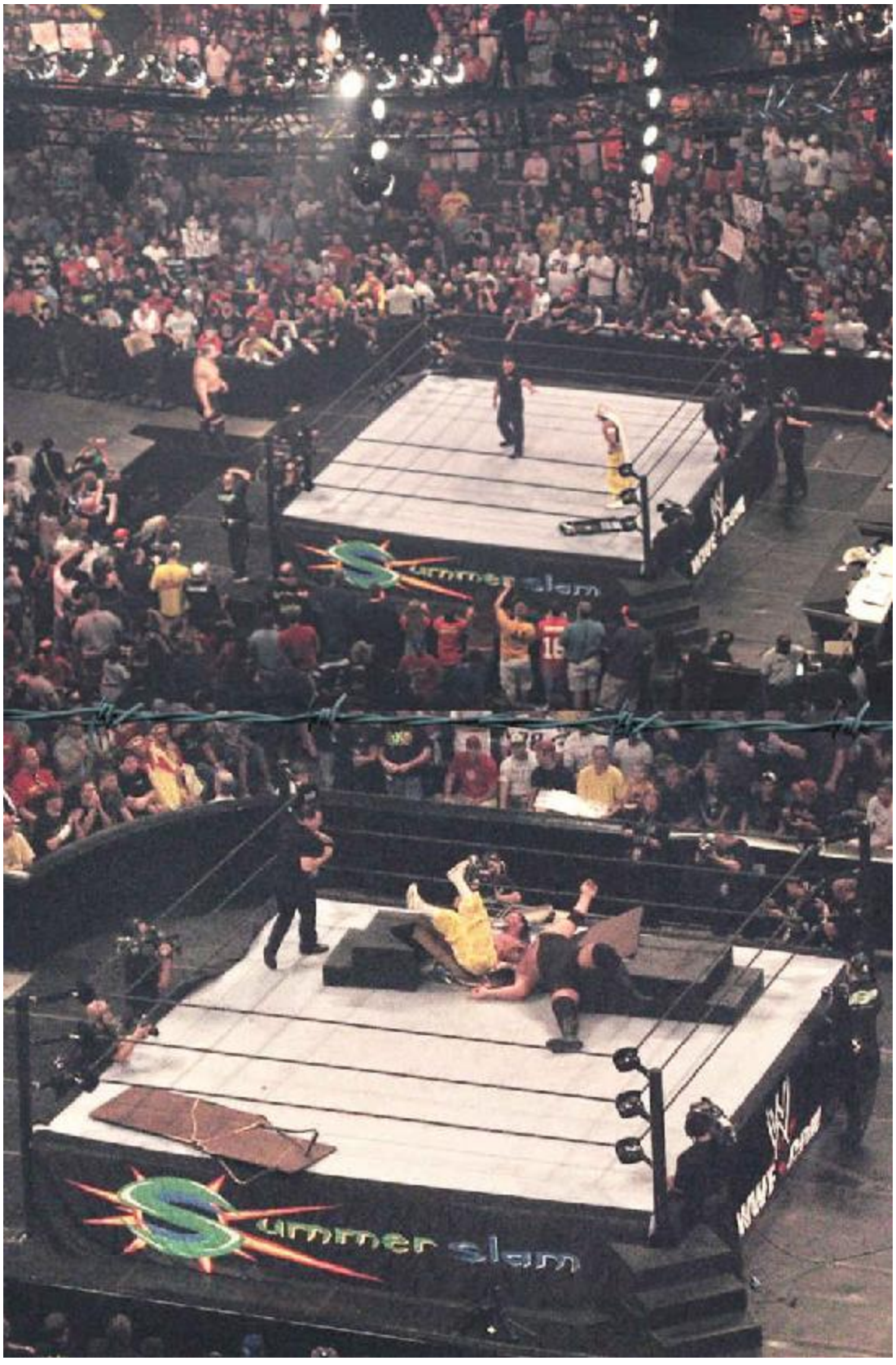
To be honest, I don't know who Sabu liked hanging out with more, me or my dog. Chewy, was a puffy chow, colored like Chewbacca from Star Wars but shaped more like a giant Ewok. That dog pretty much hated everyone, but for some reason, he loved Sabu. If anyone else was around, Chewy would be pretty independent of them and keep his distance. However, he never did that with Sabu. He gravitated to him and just slept at his feet like a long lost friend.

That Sunday, we didn't have anything, so we just hung outside catching some sun. After a while, we got bored so we decided to go on an adventure. We drove down the block a bit and went out hiking in the woods. Though I had to pull them out of him, it was always great to hear some of the stories that a traveler like Sabu had locked up inside him. When we got back, we hung out, had some grub and watched television. Hell, later on that night, Chewy even slept with Sabu on the couch! Seeing Sabu cuddle with a giant fluffy chow was a riot. Sabu is one of the kindest men I know. It was always a great time.

- Justin Credible


ECW
ECW


TALENT


Summer Slam
WWF
Summer Slam
WWF

CHAPTER 15 – WWE

A lot of people will come up to me and ask me about my time in the WWE. With all the stuff I did everywhere around the globe with wrestling, I often find it odd that some fans focus on this point in my career. The funny thing is, looking at the entire spectrum of my thirty-plus years in the business, I was only in WWE for one year from 2006 to 2007. I guess it makes sense that sometimes this short little stint in my life is such a defining one. That company has such a huge reach that many mainstream wrestling fans across the world only really know me from my time with World Wrestling Entertainment.

When it all started for me in New York, the company was getting ready for the WWE version of *One Night Stand*, which many looked at as an ECW reunion pay-per-view. What had happened at the start of it was a number of people from WWE had tried to contact me, not just one.

I was away when I got all these messages from some different people in the company. They were all trying to pull me in. There was a call from Tommy Dreamer, a call from Vince McMahon himself, I believe, and also a call from Johnny “The Dickhead” Ace, who I also call “The Master of the Snow Job.”

Now, despite the fact that there were some ill feelings from the guys about Paul Heyman still, it seemed he had my back a little and give me a call when my name was being thrown around the table.

Paul said, "Terry, you need to work the PPV payoff into the contract. You make sure you tell them $25,000 for *One Night Stand*, because you can totally get that for that one appearance alone, being the focal point of the PPV.”

“You think?”

“But also tell them that you have to have Fonzie, and you have to have me that night.”

"What if they don't go for it?” I asked.

“They will. Just make sure you ask for more money. Also, tell them you have to go over and I have to be involved in the match. Sound good?”

“You think they will buy it?”

“I am pretty sure they will, as I am pitching to Vince himself that they need to have the full ECW flavor. He knows that his hardcore fans will not

accept a cheap imitation, so he's going to have to go all the way with it."

And Paul was right! The former puppet master of ECW pulled some strings behind the scenes, and I was signed. Say what you will, but Paul really knows his shit.

So immediately, the artist formerly known as "The King of the Independents" was thrown right into the mix in the biggest wrestling promotion in the world.

When I pulled up to MY first show with WWE, my own impression of them changed. The arena that WWE had booked was, well, let's just say a little bit bigger than the ECW Arena's bingo hall. The venue had security everywhere and there were like 20 WWE trailers with pictures of their wrestlers' faces on them. As I headed for the door, I stepped over a massive thick transmission cable that led to an entire production studio crammed into a semi. I walked by the truck and checked in with the man with the clipboard.

Once in, I was looking at the biggest crew I had ever seen at a wrestling show. There were probably a hundred employees. There were ring crew members, technical guys, and pyro guys scurrying around the ring itself to figure out how to make some kind of explosion for the event. Backstage, there was a seamstress talking to a costume manager. I walked around some more, and then I smelled food. There was a huge spread like I had never seen before for employee catering. The amount of money they spent on food alone to give to the wrestlers and staff had to be more than most indie shows would even make alone in one show. There were helpers there just to help you with whatever you might need. It was then that I realized that there were even helpers for the helpers. Yes, the gophers had gophers. Vince had every corner covered.

The way that the business runs really is impressive behind closed doors. You can say what you want about the guy, but Vince's actual production is the best in the world. People are so used to all of what I saw firsthand that night with new eyes; the quality, the lights, the set, and the overall production and finished product. It was wild to see, but the WWE fans are so used to it all now, so much so that if they received any less they probably would feel ripped off.

It was even bigger than during the ECW invasion days not too long ago. With them even bigger now, I can't imagine their worth today. I was

walking around a lot of money. There were bigger payoffs for sure, but I would gather, the biggest payoffs were mostly for Vince McMahon.

Right off the bat, I hit the ground running. Since it was to be WWE versus ECW building up to a PPV pitting off the best of both promotions, they were shooting to get all of their fans interested. That is when I learned that Paul pulled even more strings to get me booked for future matches with the very best WWE had to offer, *John Cena*.

For my very first WWE match that night, I did the whole table and chair leg drop combo so people got a taste. When I went back to the Gorilla Position toward the dressing room, Vince McMahon himself was right there waiting. At first, I thought he was pissed, but that was not the case.

"Hey, pal," he said grabbing my hand and shaking it. "That seriously was one of the best matches I have ever seen in a long time."

"Thank you," I said nodding. I don't take compliments well. "Right on."

"Seriously," he repeated. "I didn't realize how good you are."

This complimentary version of Vince would only be short-lived for me, however. The second night, Vince had me walk out to ringside with him before the show. We were talking about doing a spot where I would jump from the ropes to bump John Cena through the announcer table. Distance-wise, I had done spots like that before, and it didn't seem like it would be a problem. Vince seemed unsure though with my confidence.

"Are you sure you think you can make it?" he asked.

"Yes. Yes."

"I mean it is pretty far," he said. "One time, I had to do the same spot myself, and let me tell you… I busted my ass trying to jump that far to reach it."

Maybe Vince said this to let me know he was "one of the boys," or that he wasn't asking me to do something that he wouldn't try himself. I really don't know, but I found it kind of funny so I tried to joke with him a little. Paul had told me that the real way to finding success in the WWE was by making a connection with Vince, so I thought this might have been a good time to do so with humor.

"But that's you!" I said laughing. "My ass will be just fine."

Shit. He is not laughing.

Now, I totally said that to get him to laugh, but maybe we weren't on joking terms yet and I didn't realize it. I hurt his feelings I think. He didn't

laugh. I was joking. He wasn't.

Fuck, well, that was a mistake!

REY MYSTERIO

After a quick build-up to the *One Night Stand* pay-per-view, I took on the best high-flyer that WWE had to offer, Rey Mysterio, for the World Heavyweight Championship. At the end of the match, Mysterio found himself standing on a ringside table with me flying right at him. I caught the champ in a front face lock and nailed him with a DDT which caused both of us to crash through the wood below us. At this point, the WWE medical staff rushed to us and declared that neither of us could continue and ordered the match stopped, resulting in a no-contest; Mysterio kept his title.

Things started out okay and things could have continued even better if I didn't scare the people in the back. They wanted the "Hardcore Sabu," but when they got it, I think they became afraid that I could become a liability.

During my first few weeks in WWE, I was able to do my whole gimmick, but then it quickly started to change. More and more, the agents were taking my gimmick away. They were trying to sterilize me to make me more mainstream. First, they told me no more tables and chairs, taking away a big part of my persona. Then, they asked me to cut some of the acrobatic stuff out of my move set.

The first part of June 2006, they put me into those matches with John Cena. You can say what you want about him, but he was very good in the ring and obviously can also talk. This is why he had such a long, successful run with WWE, and is now also finding success in Hollywood.

Guys who are wrestling today are more like actors and stuntmen — not wrestlers. Their lines are more important than their moves. I'm from the old school, and I say, "Fuck lines!" I tell my story in the ring. This might be why I perhaps wasn't exactly what the WWE was looking for.

TYPICAL DAY

On top of my “fuck your lines” mentality, I had a bit of a reputation for being too much of a partier. Because of this, they wanted me to show up at all WWE television tapings at 11:30 a.m. because “I was a special problem.” Since that was earlier than everyone else, I didn’t really follow that request. That was fucking ridiculous. My match usually wasn’t going to happen for another ten hours.

If I rode with Rob, I would get to the tapings at more like 2:00 p.m., or so. After a show, we would sometimes drive all night to get to the hotel at next town. Despite the fact that we might be tired, I learned quickly that I couldn’t go lie down somewhere in the arena to get some rest before the next show in WWE. I had mastered the art of the power nap. This was like a common practice for me anywhere else, but it didn’t fly at New York. If I did try to find a dark corner somewhere to catch some Z’s, one of their stooges would see me, then tell the higher-ups that I was passed out when I was only napping. They did this so it looked like they were doing something valuable to the company; job justification.

One of the things I always thought was a little ridiculous at WWE was the micromanaging. Their agents would sometimes want to go over a match at 3:00 p.m. that you would be having at like 9:00 or 10 p.m.! What is the outcome of this over-prepping? Writing something out this early makes things look very choreographed in the ring. The match then doesn’t end up looking real. It looks rehearsed because *it is rehearsed*. I was trained to call it in the ring, and that is why back in the day you had to learn how to read the crowd. You had to be able to tell a story that made sense. Today, a newer wrestler may sit with a ring-vet and call off every single spot and every single move they would like to hit in a match. The scariest thing a vet can say to a new wrestler today is, “Let’s just call it in the ring.” Newer guys just can’t do that anymore.

I remember working against my own uncle at a show one time. We had to really draw it out because a carload of wrestlers didn’t make it to the show. I had never worked a match over a half an hour before and was a little worried at first. However, I was a good listener, and The Sheik showed me just what to do.

What a learning experience that was. We went out there with basically nothing but a finish that would last all of maybe one minute, but the promoter wanted more than thirty more. That night, it finally made sense to

me. My uncle had plenty of time to show me really how to tell a story in front of an audience by reading the audience, and I got it.

His match was designed like an emotional roller-coaster; ups and downs building up to the biggest point just before it ends. At one point during our match, he put me into a submission hold to build the audience up, only to tear them back down by cutting me off. I watched his face. I could see him listening before deciding to go back into a similar spot. When he liked what he was hearing, he didn't just give them what he wanted, he cut me off again. He knew he could get more heat from what he was hearing in the ring.

When we were back down on the mat, I remember him saying, "Listen."

The audience was even hotter that next time, and probably hotter than they would be if I had been able to just get some revenge. Then, on a third submission hold, they were hotter even yet. By then, the audience was finally going crazy, and we weren't really even doing anything. I was just lying down on the mat in a facelock, and the crowd was going absolutely nuts.

The Sheik calculated his moves out right in the ring according to the response he was getting from the crowd. If he didn't hear the response, we probably wouldn't have gone back to the well two more times.

So talking out a match some six or seven hours before it is going to happen seems ridiculous to me. You don't know how the audience is going to respond, and also, the match has to come to me. And sometimes that inspiration happens right before the match, or even during — not forced hours before the match, programmed into my head. However, this is what the WWE wanted.

At the end of a typical WWE travel day, Rob and I would go grab something to eat. Then, we would go right to the hotel, or drive to the next town and then go to the hotel depending on how far away it was. It was pretty much the same thing every night. Wednesdays and Thursdays were usually off. House shows were Fridays and Saturdays. Television was Monday and Tuesdays, and pay-per-views were on Sundays. When there was no PPV, there usually was a house show in East Bum-Fuck somewhere. The idea of resting on the Sabbath was not a thing in WWE.

At the start of my stay with WWE, days were friendlier with Paul there, even though we had the ECW fallout. A lot of guys that he owed money to

wanted to kill him at first. But I didn't let him work me. I didn't drink the Kool-Aid enough to let him get that far into debt with me. I did, however, let him bullshit me in the WWE locker room and say how good I was. My guess is that was politics and he had his reasons for doing so.

I will say this: Paul did look out for me on the booking committee aka writing team. I was one of his guys, so he made sure to take care of me. My success continued to reflect on him, so it was a symbiotic relationship. However, when Stephanie took over his part of the booking and writing responsibility - that was about it.

KURT ANGLE

Some of the WWE guys still didn't like the ECW guys from way back doing business with them. Kurt Angle may have adopted that trait. He was a good worker, not a very friendly guy, but a good worker. For some reason, I think he was maybe jealous of my spot when I first showed up. The first time I met him, I remember he looked me up and down. It was really weird. We were set to have a match, and it was just awkward the way he was staring a hole in me.

"What's up, man," I said shaking his hand to break the ice. "Guess we are working together. I'm Sabu."

"I know who you are."

"Nice to meet you."

"I was the daredevil before you came in," Kurt said, which I didn't really understand knowing the way that he worked. He was more the Olympic-style, right?

"Okay," I replied, half-laughing.

"No, I really was," he said. "You are kind of taking that away from me now."

"Well, technically I was wrestling like this long before you even came along," I responded.

"You could say that."

"I just did."

"You are crazy," he said walking away.

“Thanks,” I said.

“You know, that wasn’t a compliment,” he replied.

After the match, he said that I made him look bad because I actually tried to out-wrestle him with moves. (Kurt got suspended soon after, about a week after this, I think. What happened was he wrestled RVD, knew we were tight, and took some liberties; Rob’s whole groin — his legs, dick and balls turned black and blue after some pretty stiff shots.)

Another time backstage after Kurt returned, he knew I had some stuff on me, so he didn’t hesitate to ask for it.

“Hey, Sabu. Got anything for pain?”

“Vicodin,” I said.

“What do they do?”

“You know what they do.”

“You got anything stronger?” he asked.

“Somas,” I said.

“What do they do?” he asked again.

“You know what they do, too.”

Now, people said this dude was once taking like 65 Vicodins a day. WWE put the word out not to hook him up with anything of the kind. I missed that memo, or didn’t care.

“You fucked up,” Rob said immediately after I gave him some pills. “He’s not supposed to take them, and he may even go and tell on you, because he’s fucked up.”

I forget who was there, but someone chimed in, “Nah, he is one of the boys.”

But only an hour or so later, Johnny Ace came looking for me. He was in charge of talent relations at the time. When he found me he said, “Kurt is suspended, now. Want to know why? He said you gave him some mystery pills.”

In the end, they didn’t fire me because they knew that Kurt knew damn well what he was doing — *he made his own choice*. I wasn’t really all that worried about him deflecting his anger if he were to come back while I was there, either. I wasn’t scared of locking horns. From what I saw in the ring, it really looked like he didn’t know how to fight, really. He would always put his head down and throw like windmills. I don’t know if I could out-

wrestle an Olympic champion, but I do think I could have held my own against him if I had to.

TEST

And now a few words about that cocksucker, Test.

Test was a WWE robot. They built him and led him to believe he was the greatest wrestler of all time. He believed he was tough, too because they said he was. He was good looking and let you know it. His head got really big, really quick, and, even though he is now dead, I have no problem saying he was a really a big asshole to work with.

The first time we worked together, Test kicked me as hard as he could in the jaw. When I asked him why he did that, he basically said because he was tall and I was a short little shit. I'm not the only one he did this to, either.

So, after working with him some, we had this one show in Manchester, England for the whole WWF ECW bullshit. Paul Heyman made this angle to help get CM Punk over. Some guys were already out there in the ring beating on Bobby Lashley, so me, RVD and CM Punk were set to run in to make the save.

Before the spot, Paul Heyman said, "Now, you and Punk go out there and work over Test." So that's just what we did. So, when I made it over to big, bad Test, I started hitting and kicking him, but Test wouldn't sell shit. CM Punk saw the nonsense, so he threw in a couple of shots and got the exact same reaction.

Not being known to bite his tongue, Punk said, "What the fuck? Why won't you sell?"

"I'm 6'7, and you're not," Test laughed.

CM Punk and I left the ring, and on the way to the locker room, we both vowed to never sell for him again.

A few nights later on that same very tour, there was another instance where Punk and I were in a big cluster with Test. We both hit him, and he no-sold again. We looked at each other and kind of laughed. Then, we fed

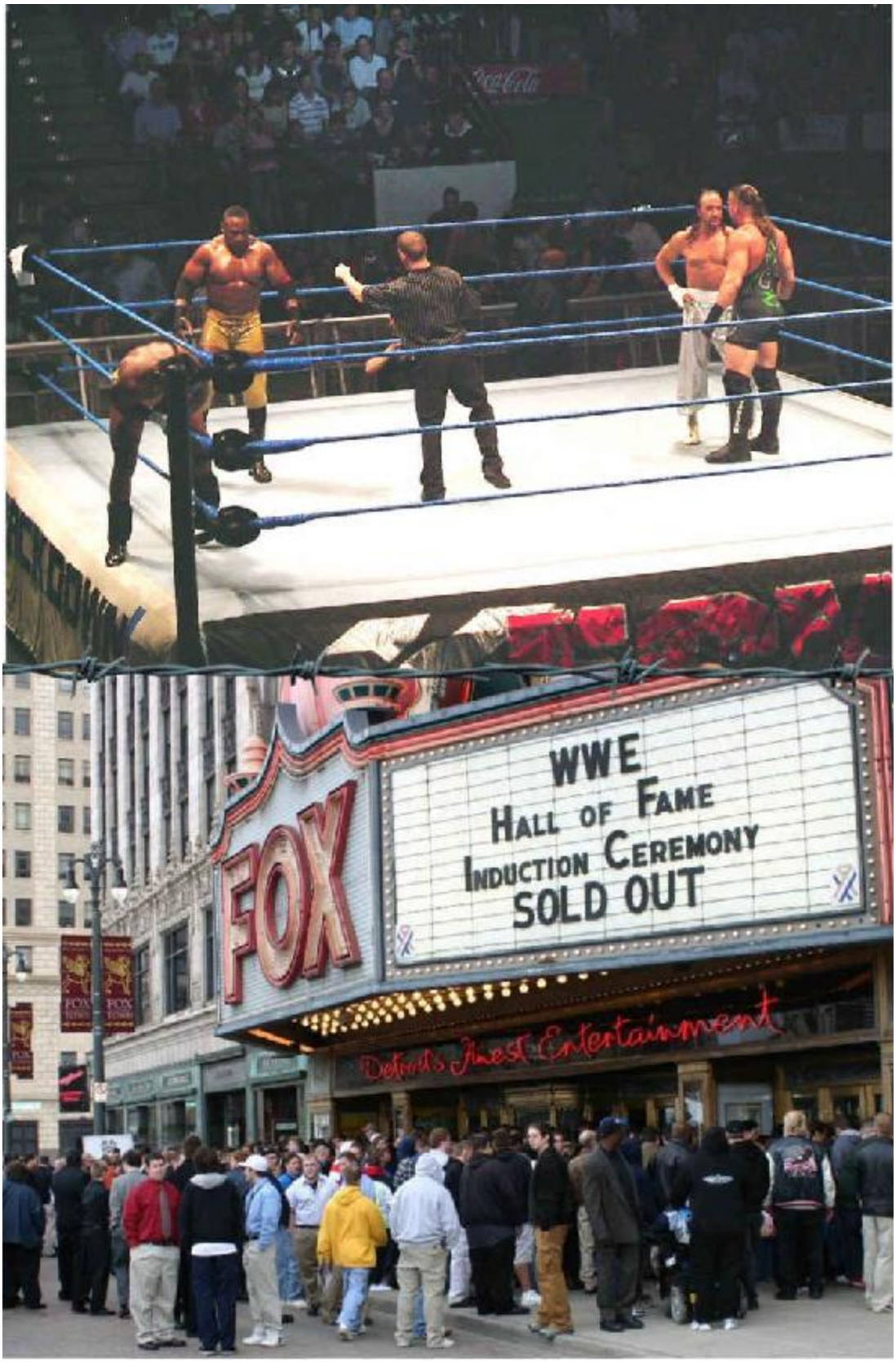
ourselves in to Test, who tried hitting us with shots, but we no-sold them as well, right back at him.

We were all just kind of standing around and it looked horrible! So, eventually, we just went back to the locker room. When they saw us, a couple of agents asked “What the hell was that?” and we told them that Test was being a fucking meathead. They agreed. Test ended up taking all the heat for being an asshole in the ring.

For the record, Test was also an asshole outside of the ring. I remember him trying to get on my good side and pretend that he was my friend, like to set me up. We would do drugs together, and then he would wait for me to get high. Once he knew that I was, he would run off and narc on me! I mean, it would be one thing if he saw me fucked up and felt compelled to tell on me for my own well-being, but that’s not what he did. He would actually ask me for drugs, take the drug right there in front of me, then go run off and tell on me. “Sabu is all fucked up right now on Somas. Quick go find him right now and see!”

Asshole. Asshole. ASSHOLE!

In the end, I guess it doesn’t really matter. Test, I won… You died first.


WWE
HALL OF FAME
INDUCTION CEREMONY
SOLD OUT
FOX
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SHEIK IN THE HALL OF FAME

On March 31, 2007, The Sheik was set to be inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame by some of his students; RVD and myself. I thought this was weird because my uncle always said there was heat with him and McMahon, but he would never really say why.

“I know my uncle hated you, Vince,” I said to him once, trying to figure out why he was considering putting him in the hall of fame in the first place.

“Hated me?” Vince laughed. “He didn’t hate me, he practically babysat for me!”

At the ceremony, Vince was backstage. He shook hands with us and saw that RVD had some papers he was looking over to say for the induction.

“Now, Sabu. Where is your speech?”

“I got it right here,” I said, pointing at my heart.”

“You better have something good,” he said. “Now, I really want you to break away from your regular character for the induction and actually talk quite a bit because this way it will be special for the fans.”

“I really don’t want to do that, Vince, I figured I could stand there and let RVD do most of the talking.

“Well, if you don’t plan on giving a decent speech, you can either just stay in the back, or I will cancel it, altogether.”

Now, I know my uncle would not have liked to have been in Vince McMahon’s Hall of Fame and was probably rolling over in his grave at the very thought. But I also knew he had family there and it was going to be a special moment for them. Therefore, I didn’t want it canceled altogether. It would undoubtedly mean something to them and be horrible if it didn’t happen.

Rob gave a great speech. He went long enough and when he was done he turned it over to me for my turn.

“This is a great honor to my family,” I said.

That was it.

It was essentially like a mic drop in the face of the WWE owner. My sense of humor always gets me in trouble and still does to this very day. I guess I’ll never learn.

When I went backstage, Vince was shaking his head and once again, Vince wouldn’t talk to me for a very long time after that.

A year later or so, I finally learned what the heat between my uncle and Vince Jr. actually was all about.

I guess Vince Sr., the father, was having troubles with his health before Vince Jr. knew enough about things to really be able to take over for his old man. His father called my uncle to have him helped book the WWWF and kind of run the show while he was getting well.

Essentially, The Sheik babysat for Vince who was still learning the business. A short time after that, my uncle went back to his own company which started to dwindle a little because he had invested so much time in helping out the WWWF that he let his own promotion slide. When he asked Vince Jr. for some help with talent, they say that Vince Jr. wouldn’t even return his calls.



CHAPTER 16 – R.V.D. ~ D.U.I.

RVD was on top of the world. By the way they were booking him, he finally achieved some kind of “nod of approval” from Vince McMahon. RVD was already carrying both the ECW title and the whole brand on his shoulders, but that was not all. Now, he was also carrying the World Heavyweight Championship. We both definitely figured that someone had given him his long-awaited “green light.”

While traveling between some shows in West Virginia and Philadelphia, RVD and I were talking about his future. We were throwing some promo ideas off of each other, when all of the sudden, we saw red lights blinking in the mirror.

“Shit,” Rob said. “Take this. Put that shit out!”

We of course were smoking some good stuff. I really didn’t want to give it up, but we both knew that was the only answer. Throwing a couple of good ones out the window was drug abuse, but we didn’t care. We knew it was probably the best idea.

Rob drove a pretty good distance after getting spotted at the very well-known Ohio speed trap that had just recently pulled over Sandman, Justin Credible and some refs. After ditching the grass out to the grass and knew it was well behind us, Rob started to slow down.

“Quick, man,” Rob said. “Get the spray! The glove compartment.”

He was almost stopped, as I jerked opened the dash to quickly spray some Ozium, which was a pothead’s savior, as is scientifically designed to cover the smell of pot. Before I could really give the back and the front a good squirt-down, I had to practically hide it away. We had to stop the car so it didn’t look all that obvious we were delaying the actual pull-over. I had sprayed the front pretty well and figured that would have to do.

The officer walked up to the rental.

“The speed limit is 55,” he said. “I clocked you at 73.”

“I thought it was 65,” Rob said, playing it cool.

“Okay,” he said, waiting for more as if he knew that we knew the drill.

“We were wrestling over in Huntington tonight and on our way to Columbus,” Rob said.

“Who were you wrestling for?” he said, I think wondering if we were pro wrestlers over amateur.

“The WWE.”

“Oh, is that right?” he asked.

“Yes, it is,” Rob answered.

The officer chuckled. “I don’t really follow wrestling, much. You somebody on TV, or something?

“I’m the world champion,” Rob said, still kind of proud after finally making that achievement. He probably figured, too, that maybe that accomplishment could help get him off with a warning, in the event that the officer liked professional wrestling. (Believe it or not, name dropping in the right situation could often really help.)

“What do you go by?”

“Rob Van Dam,” he said. “RVD.”

“Oh. Okay, I’ve heard of you,” he said, maybe being courteous, I don’t know.

“Yeah,” he chuckled, trying to keep everything friendly and light.

It seemed to be working. The officer smiled and leaned into the window a little to get a better look at me over in the passenger side of the ride. “And what’s your name boss?”

“Sabu,” I said, still hoping maybe Rob would get out of the ticket for his name recognition and maybe some autographed pictures or something. That trick often lowered bills in diners and bars. It really all came down to who you were dealing with.

“Saa-boo, huh?”

RVD laughed a little at the officer’s pronunciation of my name, trying to keep things light. (It’s a good thing he didn’t attempt Rob’s real last name off his license.)

The officer went back to his car. When he returned, we tried to look at in the window to see if he was holding a ticket or not, but couldn’t tell, due to the lights.

“Rob. It’s 55, man.”

“Yeah, I’m sorry. I didn’t realize that. I thought it was 65.”

“You were rolling pretty hard.”

“I really didn’t mean to do that.”

The cop nodded. “Hey, you always drive with your shirt off?”

“It was very hot leaving the area,” Rob laughed, knowing that it was a silly question. He hoped that the cop was just being cool and about to let us

off.

“Did you actually just wrestle tonight?”

“Actually, just a few minutes ago,” Rob said again in a chuckle.

The officer courtesy-laughed a little back. Everything seemed cool until he leaned in a little more I think to look at me again, and then it happened.

The officer’s face went sour like he just sniffed a shit in church. Yes. He caught a whiff of something, and I knew it wasn’t just a shirtless RVD’s post-match sweat. He smelled something stronger, drifting from the front to the back to escape out the open window.

“Do you have any marijuana, guns, knives or anything in the vehicle?”

“Um, no.”

“Well, can you explain to me why your car smells like dope?”

Our stomachs dropped.

A few seconds later and there was his backup. A few seconds after that and they were searching the car.

That search produced something like eighteen grams of marijuana and five Vicodin… and that's just what Van Dam was carrying.

From me, they were getting me for possession of drug paraphernalia and nine tablets of Testolactone, which were prescription. Lucky for me, the pipe was a gift from some fan. I had never used it before, and it wasn’t a crime to own it. However, that didn’t matter at the time. I was still super nervous.

We were both arrested and brought down to the station. There we posted bond and headed back to the car in the lot so we could get to our hotel for some much-needed sleep after a long night.

I’ve already had some issues with drugs, they are going to blame me for this for sure… I need to just come clean and apologize right away.

“Shit, man. Maybe we should call Johnny Ace,” I said.

“No, no, no,” he said. “I think we will be all good. Don't worry, man.”

“You don’t think we should call to try and make good before it gets to him? Are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure,” he said, trying to calm me down. “Nobody will know.”

The next day, *everybody knew.*

By the time we made it to the arena the next day for RAW tapings, all the dirt sheets were reporting and all the entertainment news stories were putting it out there. “*The WWE Champion arrested for Drugs*.”

That is all we needed.

In the arena, we walked by Vince in the hallway. He looked upset, not angry.

“I’m really sorry, Vince,” Rob said. “I didn’t mean for this to happen.”

I said something about the same.

“It’s all right,” he said, rushing by. “We will get through it. We will talk later.”

This really was a bad case of bad timing. The reason was so incredibly bad was because Van Dam was in the midst of the biggest main event push of his entire career, having won the WWE championship from John Cena at *One Night Stand*. Because WWE was in the middle of an ill-fated attempt to resurrect the Extreme Championship Wrestling (ECW) brand, Rob was also awarded the reinstated ECW title as well. So Rob had everything riding on his shoulders at this one very moment, then TMZ ran a story and crushed it all.

As soon as everyone knew we had been arrested, WWE.com made sure to play clean-up. They released a statement online saying RVD would be allowed to compete on Monday Night RAW and ECW TV during the next two nights while WWE conducted their own investigation. This was smart, because allowing him to compete during the “investigation” was really just to give WWE a chance to take the belts off him in the storylines before he was going to be sent home suspended.

Now, at this point, I had a little reputation for demons so I felt I had to “take the piss” out of everything the best I could. I didn’t want anyone to think I had caused all of this, so I went on an apology tour backstage. I went around and apologized to everyone I could who would listen; wrestlers, agents, and bosses.

“It would be a shame if Rob were to lose his momentum right now,” I said to a few of the guys. “And I’m totally willing to take the rap, myself, to keep the ball rolling.”

Yes. I offered to take the rap for RVD. I knew I had less tenure and clout than RVD, and figured maybe this was the best move. I take the hit and take a little time off. Then, they realize what I did to help and hopefully have me back. It was a good theory on paper, but it wasn’t going to play out like that. RVD himself refused to let me be the fall guy, and various officials knew my plan wouldn’t work, due to the officer’s written statements.

Before RAW that night, Vince already had things figured out. From what I gather, he wasn't really angry at RVD. He knew he was into marijuana when he hired him, and I guess he figured it was only pot. However, he had a business to run and had to lay down the law with Rob.

"Okay," he said to Rob behind closed doors. "We will need you to lose the WWE Championship to Edge tonight, then the ECW tomorrow to Big Show. Then, we will just have you take thirty days off and get some rest."

On Bruce Prichard's podcast, *Something to Wrestle With*, Bruce worded it best when he said that Vince has a very good way of purging bad stuff. All the extensive plans for RVD with two championship titles had to be scrapped and just forgotten. After what was supposed to be a decent run with the WWE title, Edge was next in line — so I guess they just had to fast forward right to the end and put him on top instantly to get over the bad press.

And so on July 3, 2006, RVD dropped the WWE Championship to Edge on Raw in a triple threat match that also involved John Cena. The very next night, he lost the ECW title to Big Show.

Ironically, both title drops were in Philly, the former home of ECW.

Because I was less important, Vince waited until Tuesday to talk with me. To his credit, he hunted me down that afternoon before the show specifically to tell me my job was safe.

"I appreciate how you handled the situation on Sunday, and I look forward to working with you still in the future."

Vince let me know that he was liking my character and considering me to be a big part of the ECW brand. He certainly could have handled things a hell of a lot worse than he did. I was fined $1,000, but they continued to use me.

During Rob's time off, he said publically on MySpace, "At least now I can finally clean out my garage, and maybe catch the new Superman movie."

FORCED TO SPEAK

Towards the end of July, people who watched WWE programming saw something that they never saw before anywhere; Sabu talking on camera for himself instead of using a manager as a mouthpiece. *Hated it.*

My first promo had me demanding a shot at Big Show's ECW Championship. In the storyline, Paul Heyman refused to grant my wish so that he could protect the Big Show, his choice for champion. Instead, he forced him into a match against the returning Kurt Angle to determine a number one contender.

After that, I found myself losing a bunch to Big Show in dark matches. They said I was supposed to beat him after a big event at MSG where they made me go absolutely crazy. After losing that match in New York, they had me throw a temper tantrum and break all these tables and chairs. The mindset was I almost had him beat and was frustrated. We were all set to go for my revenge angle and the setup for the rematch when… I got the bad news.

Behind the scenes, Big Show said he had opted for an elective hernia operation. That ended that, and I didn't get my revenge in the storyline, which kind of hurt me on TV.

A FRIEND IN THE BOOKING MEETINGS

At one particular RAW taping, I think I know what initiated the end of my push. I was part of a promo where I was standing in the ring on a chair when Paul Heyman proceeded to cut the longest promo known to man.

At a certain point when he was finished, I was supposed to count to ten and then jump off the chair onto a group standing outside the ring called the Riot Squad. However, Paul talked for seven minutes, bored the shit out of me and everyone in the arena, and the chair started giving out under me, sinking deeper and deeper into the mat.

When Paul finally finished, I just jumped right off that motherfucker and onto the Riot Squad. When I got to the back, Vince was waiting for me.

"You couldn't even count to ten for me," he said.

That was the last conversation I ever had with Vince and the last of the push.

After that, I could sense the writing was on the wall. I no longer had much TV time, and when I did get some, I was only just getting jobbed out.

Before a show, I got there really early one day and went looking for Dusty Rhodes. He had always been a good friend to my uncle, and I considered him to be someone I could easily talk to by default for this very reason.

“Hey Dusty,” I said.

“What’s up, my man?” he said patting me on the shoulder as he often did. “How are things?”

“Not so good.”

Dusty nodded like he knew why and didn’t have to say anything.

“Just wondering if you know why I’m always doing the job now?”

Dusty paused and thought for a moment to select his words. “Well, daddy. I think you need a friend in the booking meetings.”

“A friend in the booking meetings?”

He nodded again.

“Well,” I asked without saying the obvious.

Dusty waited.

“You are in those meetings, aren’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Well, what about you?”

“Like I said,” he replied shaking his head slightly. “You need a friend in the booking meetings.”

He said it as a joke, but I knew there was truth in it.

WRESTLEMANIA & THE END OF MY WWE RUN

I joined a team made for Mania that they were calling “The ECW Originals” with Rob Van Dam, Tommy Dreamer, and The Sandman. We were also being used to help get over the new ECW guys that they were calling appropriately enough “The New Breed,” including Elijah Burke, Kevin Thorn, Matt Striker, and Marcus Cor Von (a.k.a. Monty Brown; a guy I helped train who was really, really good.)



I guess it is cool that I got my “WrestleMania Moment” in before I left. Our two teams met at WrestleMania 23, and surprisingly enough, the ECW Originals won. (So like the Taker was, I’m still undefeated at WrestleMania.)

Beyond that, they kept asking me to talk in interviews, and that just wasn’t my thing. They wanted a babyface that would clap and smile and tell jokes on the mic. If that is what they saw in me, they had simply just booked the wrong guy. Every day at a taping it became the same old thing. Come 4 o’clock promo time, I would hide so that they couldn’t find me. I would accidentally stick my head out of a closet or something and a producer would get excited.

“There you are, Sabu. Now, get over here and lets quick do one live interview,” they would say.

“Just a minute,” I would say, as I would run off and hide, again.

It was pathetic that they kept asking, and maybe pathetic that I just kept hiding, someone could say. But I didn’t want to sacrifice quality and look like shit. I didn’t want to do something I wasn’t proud of.

On May 16, 2007, after asking over and over again, they finally released me from my WWE contract.

In hindsight, I probably should have played politics a little better, but that is on me. I should have just did what the owner wanted and, who knows? Maybe I would have had more success there.

When Vince said, “You know Sabu, you will make more money in merchandise than you will make in the ring,” I probably should have listened to him about being a character a little bit more and figured out how to compromise, but that’s all on me.

I understand that now even though it’s probably too late, and I kind of feel stupid.


HARD
CORE
SABU

CHAPTER 17 – AAA & TNA RETURN

After leaving the WWF, from around 2007 until about 2010, I was operating back full force into my nomad mode. I wrestled for a ton of different promotions and spot-shows all over the world.

In July 2007 with one foot out of the door in New York, I was stepping forward back into the world I knew as “The King of the Independents.” One of the first bookings I accepted saw me back in Mexico working for the AAA promotion. I was booked to work on their huge annual flagship event, *Triplemanía XV.*

Way back in 1992, just a little before I was gearing up to work for ECW, a wrestler by the name of Antonio Peña was working as a booker and writer for CMLL (Consejo Mundial de Lucha Libre.) At the time, CMLL was Mexico's largest and oldest wrestling promotions and it was the biggest game in town. Antonio was frustrated by CMLL's very conservative approach to Lucha Libre and similar to my efforts, wanted to bring some of the Japanese style to the sport. He wanted to update it, but they just weren’t having it.

Antonio talked to a number of newer talents, and he realized that he was not alone. His modern take on wrestling was something others wanted to explore, but could not, due to tradition, so, Antonio joined up with a number of younger talented wrestlers who also felt like CMLL was not moving in the direction they were hoping for. The faction decided to leave CMLL to create AAA (Asistencia Asesoría y Administración) to offer a more modern, younger product with both a more acrobatic and almost hardcore style than CMLL fans had been accustomed to seeing.

Antonio immediately sold his idea to the Televisa Television Network. His new AAA Lucha Libre promotion held their first show, which would ultimately broadcast in the Spring of 1992.

As a result of their television deal, they were better able to tell stories. After building and building up characters, week after week, a year later, AAA decided to hold their first Triplemanía event, and it was a massive success.

Triplemanía turned into an annual event that would eventually become AAA's Super Bowl, much like WWE’s WrestleMania in here in the States.

It is looked at as being their biggest show of the year that everyone looks forward to.

As you can tell, working on the 2007 *Triplemanía XV* was a big deal for me and my international brand. This event marked the 15th year in a row AAA held a Triplemanía show, and it was the 20th overall show under the Triplemanía banner.

For my appearance at *Triplemanía XV*, I did a run-in during the main event. The people immediately recognized me. However, nobody knew where I stood in Triple-A until I put their beloved La Parka through a table. The audience ate it up.

That night, I joined forces with the other American heels which included Konnan, Ron “The Truth” Killings, and X-Pac; all the imported villains that Mexican fans would recognize from American television. After that, AAA started booking me regularly. I took part many appearances on their major televised programs on Galavision, including a recurring role as a member of Konnan's heel stable there called *La Legión Extranjera*.

EXTREME RETURN TO TNA

Taking a page from WWE history, TNA decided that there might be money in getting the old gang together, and that is when they came up with the idea of an *Extreme Reunion*. So on August 8, 2010, I was booked for TNA's ECW reunion show to take on the TNA World Heavyweight Champion, Rob Van Dam. This match would take place as the main event of a card they were calling *Hardcore Justice*.

Any exposure was good exposure.

This annual PPV was originally known as Hard Justice, whose first event was held in May 2005 and since 2006, they have all been held in August. When the ECW guys were set to take over in 2010, the event changed its name to *Hardcore Justice* and has been that ever since.

MIKE JOHNSON (PWINSIDER) on HARDCORE JUSTICE

When I flew down to Florida to cover the *Hardcore Justice* PPV, Impact Wrestling pretty much gave me free reign to go wherever I wanted because

of my previous connection to ECW. Sabu was headlining that night against Rob Van Dam because Jerry Lynn injured himself training. I remember telling him backstage after the show how happy I was he main-evented. Had I not discovered Sabu and then ECW, I wouldn't be writing about wrestling. He of course sort of sidestepped the compliment, because that's how he is. He doesn't want to be that person getting the glory.

There was a cool "happy ending" after they went off the air with everyone doing The Sandman's beer bash thing. Taz and Sabu even did their old poses and went face to face but then hugged. It was a "complete circle" moment if you knew their history. Live, the show was well received, but online was another story.

Behind the scenes there were issues. A laptop disappeared and one of the ECW talents was being blamed by some for it. Allegedly, there were other things that went missing, too. This put the ECW guys behind the eight-ball. There were also the usual political issues with people from one circle trying to make sure the ECW guys didn't end up encroaching on their spots. There were complaints that the ECW names were becoming a bad influence backstage amongst other such things.

The next day was a TV taping including ECW talent. All day, Tommy Dreamer, the point person for the PPV, was putting out little fires stemming from the night before. There was back and forth with several people. One included Hulk Hogan approaching Tommy Dreamer because of complaints that Sabu was "out of it" backstage. After that, they went to the room where Sabu was allegedly "out of it" to investigate.

Dreamer called to him and Sabu immediately popped up, because he had been only taking a nap, ready to do whatever they needed of him. So, Sabu was being blamed for taking a nap the day after he headlined a PPV. Weird? Impact was a weird place sometimes.

- Mike Johnson, PWInsider.com

EXTREME VERSION 2.0

On the episode of TNA Impact immediately following the PPV, our ECW guys were renamed Extreme Version 2.0 (EV 2.0), because ECW had become a trademark of WWE. Speaking of WWE, TNA set up an angle with us by having Hulk Hogan came out to the ring and thank us for our contributions to wrestling and "raising the bar." After the former WWE front man left the ring, AJ Styles, Frankie Kazarian, Beer Money, Douglas Williams and Matt Morgan of Ric Flair's Fortune faction attacked us.

The next week on TV, Dixie Carter came to offer each member of EV 2.0 contracts so we could have it out with Fortune for attacking us. So at TNA's event, *No Surrender*, I wrestled Douglas Williams for the TNA X-Division title. After that, at *TNA: Bound for Glory*, the ECW guys beat Fortune in a Lethal Lockdown match. And then on the October 21 episode of TNA on television, RVD and I lost to Beer Money's Storm & Roode after I "accidentally" hit RVD with a chair. After that tag match, we began shoving each other to tease me leaving the company.

The reason I was leaving TNA yet again was because the rumors were true. Despite there being national exposure, there just wasn't any money in it and mismanagement was running rampant. After my little deal with them was up, I already had bookings set and was not interested in doing any more with them, for the time being. Believe it or not, the clowns had enough dates set aside for me with Juggalo Championshit Wrestling that would keep me busy from the end of the year, well into August of the next year. Knowing that TNA had a history of being temperamental in both bookings and management, I decided to go with the sure thing; a bunch of crazy clowns.

I asked to be written off and my last TNA appearance was at *Turning Point.* There, our guys took on Fortune in a ten-man tag team match where our contracts on the line. AJ Styles beat me and, as a result, it was loser-leaves-town, meaning me.

Incidentally, right after that, that prick-nosed slimy bastard, Ric Flair, got in the ring and cut a shoot promo saying he "hated The Sheik" and how he was "glad Sabu was now gone from the company."

Come on, Ric. That shit was real, and real uncalled for, once again.

Next time I see you, don't be surprised if I start chasing you again, with the intent this time to stab you in the nutsack with one of my uncle's pencils.

INDIES, INDIES EVERYWHERE

After that TNA run, I continued to just work for promotions all over the place like I always did. Some of these groups where I had multiple bookings included the United Wrestling Federation, AWF in Australia, American Wrestling Rampage out of Dublin, 2CW, IWA Mid-South, ICW, Dragon Gate in Japan, BTW (which is a spinoff of Mike Sparta's), Tommy Dreamer's House of Hardcore, and the extensive number of dates I get from the Juggalos at JCW whom I have already discussed.

Besides the wrestling promotions who were using me over and over again all over the place or at their home-bases, I worked for many fly-by-night one-hit wonder type federations that you would never hear much more than a couple of bookings out of if that. Some critics thought that because I was not wrestling on television, I had fallen into obscurity. However, it seemed I was as hot as ever! My merchandise was selling very well, and I was still being booked all over the world, and quite often in the main events of all these shows.

After making it big and appearing on TVs everywhere, I had come full circle. The King of Independents was back to claim his title, beating ass at your local VFW.

Being a free agent was and still is scary, but it allows me to go wherever I want, make my own schedule, and sometimes make even more money than I ever could working for a major promotion with a contract.

CHAPTER 18 – PWS & SATAN

In 2015, I worked for Pro Wrestling Syndicate, an independent wrestling organization that is known for booking former WWE, WCW and ECW talent, and Satan worshipers. They booked me for a show in New Jersey, and then I went home just like I did any other show. The next day when I woke up, I went to feed my dog and looked at my phone. It was flooded with messages and I had several missed calls.

"Hmm," I said, trying to figure out what had happened.

Next, I clicked on the blue and white Facebook logo. After some very quick detective work, it seemed that PWS had leaked some information about my hotel bill to the dirt sheets and social media, rather than just call me with a problem directly.

"What the fuck?"

Just like the high school girl that he is, he went on his little Facebook account and had ironically slammed *me* for "not being professional."

I dug a little deeper. My Facebook was cluttered with headlines like "Sabu Sacrifices Dog in a Satanic ritual," and "Sabu Bled and Shit all over his Hotel." Fans were chiming in on Twitter from all over the world that they thought it was "just terrible what Sabu did to his poor little dog." I was reading that line incidentally, as the same dog I've had for 15 years was eating comfortably from a bowl at my feet. Come to find out, co-promoter Pat Buck made a bunch of noise and just didn't say something wrong to the wrong person; he made a very long detailed post on his social media about how horrible his experience was using me at his show.

This Pat guy started off his rant explaining why he didn't like me even before the past show. At the start of his diatribe, he mentioned the very first time his co-promoters booked me at an autograph signing — and how he felt that I slighted him.

Pat said that I "didn't recognize him" and rushed passed him with Melissa Coates (my manager who handles all of my business in and out of the ring) in the hallway. He then explained that he knew I was worried we were running out of time, and that I didn't want to be late for his fans, "Fuck this guy, Melissa," he said I said. "We are going to be late." I think mostly his ego was just butt-hurt for not being recognized as the big-time wrestling promoter he felt he was.

In his post, he said, “Even though I was in a suit, Sabu actually thought I was a fan hitting on his chick. Mind-blowing. It was then I said I could tackle and pummel Sabu, but then I'd be leaving in handcuffs and the event would be ruined,” he said in. “I was furious, so I followed him into the autograph room and went face to face with Sabu. ‘I’m not sure if you know this, but I'm one of the promoters for tonight, but you can't speak to me that way, and you can't speak to fans that way. Do we have a problem?”

I didn’t have a problem with him then. I just didn’t know who he was, legit. I would eventually find a problem with him, however, as time went on.

On top of displaying some classic little big-man syndrome and acting like a little yip-yip dog, I soon learned apparently that this “promoter” also has a habit of bringing in big names just to put over his buddies. On two occasions before my “satanic ritual,” I told him that I would come in to work for them, but I wasn't going to be used as enhancement talent for his friends, but I ended up doing the job for them twice, anyhow. They did it to me two times before, so on the third time when I said no, they were pissed. They wanted me to both kiss the promoters’ asses, and also put over this fat-ass Japanese prick that I've never heard of. I’ve worked a lot in Japan, and still continue to. I'm sorry to say he's a nobody, *but he’s nobody.*

“I knew that if I dealt with this situation myself,” Pat’s post said about when I went to them about not wanting to be booked as a jobber, “…it would have ended up in a brawl that I would be happy to partake in, but I just didn't want to ruin everyone's night.”

Who was unprofessional again?

After that, the long post went on to bitch about an additional smoking charge that the hotel hit him up for on his credit card. He said that the hotel also found needles, blood, and dog feces all over the room. Give me a fucking a break.

It's funny as hell because the truth is just not as good as what he made it sound like. He made me sound like some kind of dark and evil Satan-worshipping rockstar. But when I first heard the way he described it, I had to laugh out loud at the nonsense I was hearing. I almost kind of wished it was true. *It made me seem pretty bad-ass.*

First off, however, Pat Buck wasn't charged for the hotel room, I was. The hotel took my credit card for incidentals. Next, I have a little dog and it

made a little mess, which I cleaned and threw in the little garbage can. There were no needles. There was blood in the shower because, you know, I bleed at these wrestling shows, and that's just the way it is. But I didn't bleed all over the place, and it wasn’t dog blood. I bled on the shower curtain and maybe got some on a towel or a sheet, but they made it sound like I murdered someone in that room and then sacrificed my dog to the devil. That sounds great, but it's not just true.

“From man to man, Sabu, you need to wake up and make the most of your time,” Pat said, concluding his bullshit epic post on me. “You can take something from this or if you want to throw down, I really don't care and welcome it, but just realize it's 2015 and no one will tolerate your bullshit.”

Buck blew the whole situation out of proportion. He questioned my professionalism publically using unprofessional language and threatened me with violence.

Here is what I got out of reading Pat Buck’s dumb shit on that day, and also again today when I tried to interpret it through all the 10-pages of bullshit:

“Hello. Despite the fact my mommy didn’t breastfeed me long enough, I am a tough guy. I got some good publicity for my promotion when I bitched and whined about Sid online about not being able to make it to one of my bullshit shows. I also did the same thing with Sabu so I could look extra tough. However, I am not just tough, I am a professional, tough, animal-loving, suit-wearing, credit card-owning, no BS-tolerating, wrestling-lingo-knowing, tough, tough professional man, who is very professional, and also very tough.”


EXTR
CHAMPIONSH

AL SNOW on SABU & THE INDIES

Sabu left a mark that still exists right now in wrestling today everywhere. Back in the day, wrestlers in ECW copied and capitalized off of a lot of things Sabu created and did before anyone else ever had. Even a lot of the wrestlers in WCW and WWF/E were inspired by Sabu and utilized his creativity to take some of the elements of his style and make it their own. Sabu did a lot of innovative things that wrestlers still copy even today every week on television.

I think the casual fans have kind of forgotten just how much an effect Sabu's career has had on the evolution of wrestling. Whether he knows it or not, he really has done a lot for a lot of guys in the business, and he even has done a lot for me.

Sabu genuinely loves the business — so much so that I witnessed Sabu numerous times speak up against promoters to help out other wrestlers. Sometimes promoters wouldn't pay a younger guy, and Sabu would actually take money out of his own pocket to make sure that those wrestlers had something to eat and some money in their pockets so they could survive. You don't see that in any walk of life anymore, let alone in wrestling. Sabu was the kind of person who did those kinds of things. His generosity was unheard of.

One time, we were working for a guy named Joe Lake. That guy booked a whole bunch of guys on the show, then skipped out with the ticket money before paying the lesser-known guys on the card.

I had already worked that night against Dan Severn as “Shinobi” before I heard the news. When I came back to the locker room, I learned that the promoter had bailed and that Sabu's opponent was also now pulling a no-show, probably because of the pay situation. Rather than leaving the show altogether, Sabu came up to me and asked me to work again, but this time with him. (That move was thanks to Phyllis Lee, who pushed Sabu into asking me. I guess Sabu was a little too shy to ask. He knew the morale was low because most of the guys were not going to get paid, but Sabu really wanted to save the show for the fans.)

Anyhow, Sabu asked and I agreed to do it. I’m glad I did. We had this awesome match on the fly out of nowhere. At the end of the night, I remember coming around the corner in the locker room and seeing Sabu

actually paying some of the boys he knew, actually sharing his own payday, so that they could get to the next town. That is just the type of guy he was.

Karma is real. That match, incidentally, paid off for Sabu (and myself) in the long run. Even though he lost money that night on Joe Lake's sow, we turned that negative into a positive. The match we had was so good that we decided to repeat it on other shows, and we made it even better every night that we did it. We took that very same match on the road to other promotions, and Sabu made his money back, for sure. Eventually, our matches together started to get me noticed. Working with Sabu ended up getting me booked in other places where I had never worked before. Because of my matches with Sabu, I really started to catch on. That's all because of him and for that, I have to thank him.

Sabu was always safe, always worked hard, and always listened to what I had to say. The matches we had together were not all extreme matches, either. A good majority of what we did were just really good, solid wrestling matches that made sense. I knew how to work with Sabu and his style, and I accentuated whatever he did in the ring. And then, in turn, Sabu would let me shine and highlight myself in a manner that made it look like we were competitive and truly trying to beat each other. People believed it, and it was always great. Even back then in that day, people would come up to us and say, "Wow! You guys really seemed like you were trying to win. You both really seem like you're trying to beat each other."

Wrestlers are tough. We are all tough human beings to be able to do what we do, and it's always hard to say that one guy is tougher than another. But I'll tell you what though, — Sabu had grit.

Generosity and love of the sport? He did what he did because he loved wrestling so much that he never wanted to not give the fans what they paid to see.

I know it sounds cliché to say it, but Sabu always gave them 100% no matter what condition he was in and still does, today. If that meant he had to go back to the locker room during the middle of a match and super glue his arm shut, or tape his ribs up to hold his insides in, he'd do just that then run right back out to the ring and finish the match.

- AL SNOW



A young Al Snow (LEFT), Sabu (CENTER), and ring agent
Terry Funk (RIGHT), with manager of the night
Damien 666 (REAR) for a match in
La Puente, California back on 9/1/1994.

CHAPTER 19 – NOW

So what is going on with me right now?

For those of you who haven't seen me for a while, I'm still out there all of the time and will probably be in a town near you soon. I'm on the road most every weekend tearing it up, doing the same thing I started way back in the 80s & 90s. Not much has changed, except now I get a hell of a lot more conventions and autograph signings. That whole "pay to meet a celebrity" scene has become new money-making racket and created a whole new fan base of "Meet-heads."

On the wrestling scene, I do have a new manager, since Fonzie has pretty much retired. Melissa Coates, aka "Super Genie," helps me in and out of the ring now, and she's a million times better and better looking than Fonzie.

With all the foul and filth to come out of XPW, the one good thing I took from there was Melissa. I first met her there, I think before she was even wrestling yet, and more into bodybuilding and fitness.

She handles everything for me now. She does my booking, merchandise, and even my day-to-day stuff. She deserves more recognition and respect than words can even give her.





Looking back at my life, do I have any regrets now?

No. I mean, not really. I suppose I could have been more political and maybe got a little further in my career, but then again, if I had, I wouldn't be real.

I do have more things that I just don't like, rather than actual regrets. I guess I don't really like the "Sabu Botchmania" videos I see on Youtube. You know, the ones where you see the title that says, "Five Botched Sabu Spots in 45 seconds." Whoever took the time to make these little gems – *Fuck you.*

But while I am on the subject, I have to say at least I was trying to do something different when I botched those moves. Think about this. You have to at least try to do something great, or you will never *actually do anything great*, right?

Can't blame a guy for trying. That's how I have always lived my life.

OLD SCHOOL vs NEW SCHOOL

Now they say I may have helped usher in a new way of wrestling, but I'm not "new school" by any means. Wrestling changed. They say it has "evolved," but I think there's still a lot to learn from looking at the past. When looking at the whole "old school vs new school" debate that comes up today, I guess I'd like to offer some advice.

For one, to the new boys coming up; learn your basics first, and then you can go all hardcore later. You shouldn't go for all the hardcore stuff right away. I didn't have a cage match for something like ten years before I went that route. Having a knowledge of the basics first will make that stuff even better.

Then, about being stiff… *Know when it's appropriate.* People have often asked me who the stiffest worker I have ever worked with is. Well, I guess, for the record, Bam Bam Bigelow was probably the stiffest in the ring. RVD was stiff too, but didn't really give many receipts; we just worked that style together. For the new boys coming up, I guess I should also say, you shouldn't be too stiff in the ring, or on the mic, unless you have to.

Like late in 2017, I was working a match in Scotland. There was this super green guy who I took on. He was friends with the promoter who decided to put him over on me to help build him up. I was cool with it, so I took his Canadian Destroyer, and did the job. Now, he wasn't stiff with me in the ring any more than I couldn't handle. It was what he did after the match that was stiff. After the finish, he got up and took it upon himself to "go into business for himself," at my expense. He got on the mic and stiffed me on a promo.

"Look at this no-good, has-been, piece of shit," he said, or something close to that.

What the fuck?!

I laid there on the mat for a minute continuing to sell his finisher for him, as he continued to bury me and say how much better he was than me. I couldn't believe it. Eventually, it reached the point where it was almost disrespectful, and then I was totally insulted. I mean, maybe I am wrong, but I just tried to make him look good, but then in return, I felt like he had

some nerve to call me “old,” call me a “has-been,” and even call me “a piece of shit” …all after I just put him over. I admittedly got pissed at his burial of me on the mic, and my bitch-switch flipped on.

My manager jumped in the ring to help. “You, okay?” Super Genie (Melissa Coates) asked.

“Um, no,” I said rolling over toward the corner, starting to get up.

Now, I know she didn’t ask if I was “okay” because she was worried that I looked injured from taking the Canadian Destroyer. She asked if I was “okay,” because she could see how angry I looked, and she was wondering if I was about to go ape-shit on the asshole holding the mic.

“Melissa,” I said. “Get out of the ring,”

If Melissa is good at one thing, that is listening.

She bailed.

I got up and I went right after him.

He dropped the mic. I chased that shit-talking little cocksucker in circles and then right out of the ring. He jumped in the audience. After throwing all those personal insults at me, I was aiming to throw some stiff shots back at him as a receipt. While he was running, I threw a few chairs at him, as well. After calling me weak, and making me look like an idiot, he was the one running like a pussy back to the locker room to take cover …*and I was right behind him.*

“What the hell was all that?” I asked, catching up to the little bastard. “I just tried to make you look like a million bucks, but now I’m a nobody and a piece of shit?”

He didn’t respond. It almost seemed as if he cowered a little in a corner as if to say, “Please don’t hit me, Mister Sabu.”

Then I realized it. This bullshit was probably a direct result of “old school vs new school” training. He probably didn’t know any better on what to say on the mic because he was still greener than baby shit. You never want to just bury your opponent. You should always build them up so when you defeat them, it actually means something.

I’ll tell ya, half of the new guys out there today are great, but the other half would never have survived back in the day. I guess it’s because these days, a lot of guys aren’t at all trained like my uncle used to train us. Fuck, some guys aren’t even trained at all. I knew he had learned his lesson the

hard way about respect, being stiff on the mic, and about burying a guy. Finally, it was time for me to lighten up again.

“Well, do you have anything else to say?” I asked.

He paused to choose his words carefully. “Well, yes. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to upset you. Honest.”

“I don’t mean that,” I said. “I mean out there on the mic?”

He looked at me puzzled.

“I mean go back out there and finish your promo - but just keep me out of it, okay?”

Stiff. I know. But old-school training still works and maybe he’ll be better for it now with other guys trying to help him out. I don’t know.

I guess you have to learn somehow.

HEEL ON TWITTER

I’m an old school guy learning the way of the new-school. I’m not great on the computer, but I’m learning the evil ways of Twitter and Facebook.

In the entertainment industry, it is all about staying in the public eye. You have to constantly reinvent yourself to stay with the times, right? They say it is all about “hits” these days, and that even bad publicity is good publicity, right?

If you have seen me on Twitter lately, you might be one of many who love my wrestling but also think I’m a politically incorrect asshole now with absolutely no filter. If you are, it is possible you’ve been worked for a reaction.

As they say in wrestling, “controversy creates cash,” and while some of what I say on Twitter is true, some of it is not and is just being posted to get people riled up. It works. People remember me for shocking them in the ring, and now I am doing something similar on Twitter by saying shit some newer fans don’t always like. My bad.

Believe it or not, but I’m keeping my name in the public eye on social media. And, believe it or not, I am still getting work every weekend partly because of my “not giving a fuck” attitude online with heel heat.

If I have to play the heel sometimes to get work, I’m up for it.

SHOUT-OUTS

To my wonderful Melissa, thank you for being in my life and keeping me sane like nobody else can do. You deserve all the respect in the world.

To Rob, thank you for always being there. We have been up and down the road together and your friendship to me means more than you will ever know.

To all my other ECW fraternity brothers and sisters, thank you for everything and all the memories.

To all my new friends in every locker room across the world, I say, "Thank you, and I hope to see you again soon!"

To all my fans, thank you for supporting me in my career after all these years.

F.U. SHOUT-OUTS

Now, to all the insecure, jealous, backstabbing, cock-sucking cheap, no-selling assholes I have come across, I'd like to close with some special "Fuck You Shout Outs," that I crafted just for you ala "Sabu Twitter style" complete with extra commas for extra emphasis,,,

To Kurt Angle,,, because I may have to wrestle you again one day I won't hit you with a stiff "Fuck You," but maybe something just a little underneath that and more professional. You know, like a, "You, sir, I could do without."

To Test,,, I would like to send a really big "Fuck You Shout-Out" beyond the grave to a bastard who no-sold like an asshole and always tattled like a baby.

To Koji Kanemoto and his no-selling bullshit,,, Fuck you and your no-selling bullshit.

To Jim Ross,,, I say "fuck you" for treating the Sheik like trash and ripping him off. You still owe him money, you cocksucker. Feel free to Paypal me the $150,000 or whatever it is at your early convenience. Prick.

To Ric Flair,,, and to (even though I may need him one day) Johnny "The Dickhead" Ace,,,, "fuck you" both for your political bullshit. I would also like to add Jerry Lawler, Bill Dundee, and Michael Hayes to this list too, just because you all really suck.

To Vince McMahon,,, believe it or not, I won’t say “fuck you” to you Vince because you never really said anything to my face that was actually not somewhat professional. You have done a lot for the business that I love and given a lot of my friends work. So for all of this, I do have respect for you. I will say this, though, “You always shook my hand like a short-bus meathead, almost pulling my shoulder right out of the socket.”

… And finally,,, To the rest of you out there that done me wrong,,, and to all you trolls on the internet, “F.U.”


CW
FU
SABU
FTW







Seriously, shout out to all my friends who have supported me all these years and know what I stand for. They know that it’s hard to end this book, because for me it’s not over. I’m still a journeyman. I’m still living the life of a king… the King of Independents. That means every weekend, I am still out and about making appearances, doing autograph signings, and yes, still wrestling around the world with my manager The Super Genie right by my side, giving you my all.

I’m treated like royalty at times, and other times not so much - flying in less than coach holding a chicken in my lap and sleeping in a cockroach motel. It all comes with the job.

Haters hate, and would rather do that than to do something for themselves. They make stupid comments about my “MC Hammer” pants, but I literally “have toured around the world from London to the Bay” – doing what I love. I challenge you to do the same.

If I could do it all over again and shed less blood and avoided more injuries at the expense of my performance in the ring, I wouldn't even consider it.

Not one drop of sweat, blood or shred of brain tissue was wasted away in regret. I am proud to call myself a professional wrestler and I know that my uncle, The Sheik, is looking down on me somewhere, pencil in hand, and couldn't be more proud.



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FROM KENNY CASANOVA:
…I dedicate my work to my lovely wife Maria for putting up with me & dealing with the countless hours spent on this project! …to Marty for the pages and pages to deal with (I assure you) …and to anyone else who supports these wrestling books to keep the legend alive!



KENNY CASANOVA
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Kenny is a ring announcer, pro wrestling manager, wedding DJ, English teacher, and Fulbright Scholar. As the organizer of this project and other ones like it, his recent mission has been helping guys like Brutus Beefcake & Kamala get their stories out there for the appreciation of future generations.

Please email questions or promotional inquiries to Kenny himself at **ken@kennycasanova.com,** or find him on all social media platforms.

Walking On Hot Waffles is at WOHW.com
for more books like this one including *Kamala Speaks*, *Brutus Beefcake*, *Vader Time*, and *Mr. X: Dangerous Danny Davis*.

RAVEN SPEAKS ON "SABU: SCARS, SILENCE, & SUPERGLUE"

"Congratulations. You found the mystical autobiography of Sabu... nephew of the legendary Sheik, a funny intelligent guy who gave more to the business than most ever will and a man who has both more balls and athleticism than anyone I've ever met.

As far as having balls – Once in a barbwire match, Sabu's arm was cut so deep that the actual bone was showing! So what did he do? The one thing no one else ever would – call for a roll of tape to close it and continue on! "No fear, no pain, no problem for Sabu." Anyone else would have called for a stretcher, a doctor, or at the very least to stop the freakin' match, but he didn't think twice about that bullsh*t. He just matter-of-factly taped it shut like it was a mosquito bite, and wrestled on, complete with all the death-defying spots you'd expect. ...WTF? Now, that is F'N balls!

As far as athleticism – Another time against me, Sabu had a broken arm in a cast from his shoulder to his elbow, forcing it up in an "L" formation. I was down in the center of the ring when Sabu hopped up on an open chair and sprung to the top rope. There, he balanced a second before flying off at me in a flip mid-air! I moved and Sabu landed, somersaulting right up to his feet. Now, maybe a few others in the world can do this, but Sabu did it with a useless arm bent at 90-degrees! ...WTF? Now, that is F'N athletic!

I'll leave you with is this; I've got a million Sabu stories, but finally now you can read them here from the man himself. He's genuinely a great guy and I'm proud to be his friend... although how we became friends, well that's a whole other story!"

Quote the Raven, nevermore! - Raven



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SABU

SCARS, SILENCE, & SUPERGLUE

"Sabu" Terry Brunk
with Manny Casanova